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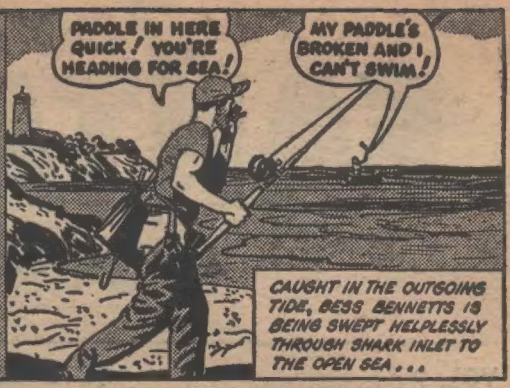
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VOL. 9 OCTOBER, 1947 No. 1

Book-Length Novel

The City of Wonder — **E. Charles Vivian** — 6

Hidden by the centuries, guarded by nameless horror, lay the secret heart of Kir-Asa, whose password to strangers was—Death!

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Can Doomsday be at hand . . . can the world lie dying of its own fury . . . as long as one brave youth and one girl with a dream still live?

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THE CITY OF WONDER

By E. Charles Vivian

Hidden by the centuries, guarded by nameless horror, lay the secret heart of Kir-Asa, whose password to strangers was — Death!

He straddled his legs on the quivering, bucking stone. . . .

CHAPTER I

THE WRITING ON THE ROCK

KIR-ASA stands, trebly guarded, and most remotely secure of all the world's secret places since men began to make history, away in the wilds that still exist in certain lands of the Pacific. The way to Kir-Asa is guarded by savages who persist in the use of poisoned arrows, by snakes of the jungle, and the things of the wild that are fierce as the savages, stealthy as the snakes, and stronger than either savages or snakes.

If you would approach the barriers that guard Kir-Asa, you must come in a boat of shallow draught to a shore that is mud unalloyed. Then you get out from the boat with a rope to tow it to solid ground if you want it for the return journey, and flounder knee-deep across the flats over which the tide washes.

Later, you come to a belt of coarse grass beyond reach of the tides, where land-crabs run about; beyond this is scrubby bush, then open grassland, and then jungle-clad, gentle slopes rise and fall, each ridge a little higher than the last. And then there is a long, slow decent to open, treeless marsh, where the waterfowl rise up in clouds at sight of a human form, and the mosquitoes swarm, pestilentially. It is three days' journey from the coast to the nearer edge of this marsh, two days

more of weary travelling across the marsh, and then the thick jungle begins again.

That way came Watkins, Bent, and I, Faulkner. Watkins—so he told us at the outset—had the tale of Kir-Asa and various landmarks from an old, old Dyak who had travelled far in his time, and whom Watkins met up in British North Borneo. He had persuaded the tramp steamer's captain to bring us and our gear and our flat-bottomed boat down the coast, and to drop us off the mud shore. From the Dyak, he said, he had landmarks, which he would not describe to us, to bid him leave the steamer so as to strike the shore nearest to Kir-Asa.

As to food, we had no trouble either in the five days of dreary labour that took us to the jungle edge after we had secured our boat well above high-water mark, or, in fact, at any time in the expedition, except for such as shall be told in its place. There were three or four species of antelope, and wildfowl without end, and we had two rifles and a double-barrelled shot-gun in addition to our revolvers. Also we were not much troubled as regards water; our chief preoccupations were those of warding off fever and possible roving savages, though of the latter we had little fear until we had got through the marshy belt. It was no country to attract even a savage, but a misery to travel through and a matter for relief when passed.

Before the heat grew to torture, the morning of the sixth day, the jungle edge showed like a wall before us. We paused in the slush of the marshland, gazing, and suddenly Watkins pointed at what looked like a sunken gully in the forest top.

"The road to Kir-Asa," he said.

It was as if, at that point, the jungle growth had failed, or as if it might at one time have been, as he said, a road, for though jungle creepers laced and twined there as elsewhere, there were no great trees—there was no evidence of heavy, monstrous forest growth such as luxuriated on either side of the road, or ravine, or whatever it might be. We floundered toward it, our boots squelching and sucking in the sodden marsh; all three of us were agueish, spent with the steamy damp of the last two days' travel, and sore from the bites of many insects. Yet we were all heartened when Watkins pointed—the tale told by his old Dyak held good, so far.

So we came to the fall in the level of the jungle roof, and, before we reached the edge of the jungle itself, found firm ground beneath our feet. I paused and, turning, called to the others to look back; we were on a ridge, or causeway, which ran arrow-straight across the marsh, raised above the level of the water-logged land.

"Aye," said Watkins, "the road to Kir-Asa. If we had struck it before, we'd have been here sooner."

In making up our equipment, he had put in three of the big knives—in Mexico they call them *machetes*—with which one can slash through undergrowth, and now we found the need of these. By nightfall we had slashed our way about a mile into the jungle, following that lightening of the growth and absence of great trees that made a continuation of the slight ridge or causeway across the marsh. We made a clearing, built and lighted a great fire, and so camped. My hands were a mass of blisters from the *machete* handle, and I was stiff and shivering with the fever from the marsh lands. Bent was but little better, but Watkins, tough pioneer that he was, seemed as happy here as when we had first met him, a year before, over in Java.

"Ah, you boys!" he said. "You'll harden off before you're through."

IN THE morning he pulled away creeper roots, and dug and fussed in the soft leaf mould down beside our fire, until he had a hole or pit six or seven feet deep—the stuff cleared away easily enough. At this depth he dug and dug with his *machete* point, flinging out earth and rotted vegetation until the *machete* struck and rang on something hard. With his hands he cleared a space about a yard square, or a little more, and, jumping down into the pit, we saw enough of his clearing to give us an idea of the nature of the road to Kir-Asa.

The little piece that he had uncovered was solid rock, laid in blocks of about a foot square that fitted diagonally to each other as one looked up or down the direction of the road—that is, the corners of the squares pointed up and down the direction in which we were traveling, and the sides of the blocks were diagonal to the line of the road. So perfect was the fitting of these blocks that a fine knife-blade could not have been inserted between them, and now we knew why only the lighter jungle creepers grew along the way. And this great work, we estimated, was not less than sixty feet in width.

I thought of the Forth Bridge, of the Pyramids, of St. Peter's at Rome, of New

York's skyscrapers; I called to mind the great architectural and engineering achievements of the world, and knew them all for pigmy trifles compared with the building of this tremendous causeway, so solidly laid that in unnumbered centuries the jungle that had hidden it could not conquer or break it. If the mere road was such titan's work, of what fashion must be Kir-Asa, to which the road led?

In the lower jungle between the marsh and our camps, only the existence of this road, preventing the heavier jungle growth from taking root, made it possible for us to cut a way—to either side the forest was impenetrable, except for an organised expedition with adequate means for clearing.

But, from the point of our camping, the way sloped upward, and as we went up the undergrowth thinned out until, save for slashing at a creeper here and there, we had free passage-way through the gloom of the forest. For still it was forest; where the moisture was not enough to nourish the rank undergrowth of the lowlands, still the soil would feed the more deeply rooted trees which crowded on each other to either side of us, while our causeway, buried as it was feet deep in leaf-mould, still refused to support heavy timber, and nurtured only saplings and rank tropic weed.

Thus, the going having become easier, we made a dozen miles that day. An hour before nightfall we followed a game track into the wood on our right and found a drinking pool. Down by its edge Watkins cut a snake in half with his *machete*, just in time to save Bent's life—the snake was in the act of springing when the blade fell on it, and, had its fangs reached Bent, he would never have seen sunset.

Having drunk our fill, and replenished our water-bottles, we went back to the causeway. There we built our fire, cooked our meal, and camped for the night.

"Why are we the first to come this way?" I asked Watkins, as we sat by our fire that night.

He looked at me with a slow, reflective smile on his lined face. "When I was in London," he answered, "I met a man who had lived there fourteen years and had never been inside St. Paul's Cathedral."

I pondered this while he smiled. A lean, spare little man, attractively ugly, who, if he travelled from Hong-Kong through the Straits to Auckland, could speak the tongue of nearly every native he might meet on the way; who knew all the customs of the East, and nearly all its legends—a man who had little liking for civilization, and a reputation for going on strange quests, like this of Kir-Asa. Such was Watkins, our leader and indeed our chief.

"I am not sure we are the first," he said.

"Who else, then?" Bent asked.

Watkins shook his head. "Past my telling, as yet," he answered.

We sat silent about the fire for a while. Bent threw on the flame more of the dead wood we had collected.

"The Pacific is full of legends," Watkins said at last, "and the more one knows of native dialects, the more stories one hears. There's the sunken treasure of the Pahenge River, and the jewels of the ruined temple of Mah-Eng, and the lost ruby mine in the Firesi hills, and I know four different stories of buried pirate hoards. Nobody had ever been to look for these things, as far as I know. A legend grows up on a little less than nothing, and people distrust it.

Bent yawned sleepily. "How much farther have we to go?" he asked.

Watkins shook his head. "A day, a week, a month," he answered. "I don't know, and—does it matter? So long as game and water don't fail us—the old Dyak I got this story from could only tell me how to find the trace of the road at the edge of the jungle, by the sinking among the treetops—I'd heard of the existence of Kir-Asa before."

"What of it?" I asked.

"The oldest work of man left on earth," Watkins said.

"But...." Bent put in, and paused.

"Well," Watkins said, "our agreement was quite good enough for you when we made it—good pay for both of you for a year, or as much longer as the trip lasts, and twenty per cent apiece of any findings."

"What are the findings?" Bent asked rather irritably—in spite of quinine, he was still a little under the marsh fever.

"Kir-Asa, perhaps," Watkins said. "Jungle and old ruins, bare rock, gold, crumbled tombs, decay, nothing—Kir-Asa."

I had a feeling that he knew more than he cared to tell, though why, buried in the heart of the jungle, he should withhold from us any of the story that he knew, was more than I could guess.

I had met him, a year before, in Java, and had got to know him and like him better as I knew him more. About a

month before we landed on the mud flats he had put the proposition of the quest before me, telling me even less than he told now, but offering good pay, and a year's wage in advance if I accepted the proposal he made—which I was glad to do.

Before he came to me, he had found and fixed up with Bent on terms similar to those he and I made. He had done all the organising, taken command, and with a year's pay to my credit I had set out with him and Bent, content in the knowledge that my pay was awaiting me at the end of the venture, and perhaps more than the mere pay. As to this latter, however, I knew nothing; I followed where Watkins led, and if the twenty per cent of findings materialised in any large way, so much the better. Meanwhile, I went on with an easy mind, except when snakes were numerous, as they were at times in the jungle undergrowth.

WE CAME out, at about noon of the next day, through thinning growth to country resembling English park-land. There was rich, long grass, with scattered clumps of ancient trees, yet not so scattered that they did not hide the view at little more than a mile away from us. Our pocket aneroid gave us an elevation of four thousand feet, for the way had sloped upward in varying gradations since we left the marsh behind, and here the air was fresh and cool compared with the clammy heat of the lowlands behind us, although in reality it was still well above the normal warmth of white men's countries.

Still the trace of the mighty road guided us. The clumps of woodland, scattered about this park-like expanse, left clear a way that went straight as a stretched cord for miles, up to a rise beyond which showed a great smoke that went up to the sky and wavered and broke in the wind that set in steadily from the coast we had left. Here, as in the jungle, the road had become overgrown and buried in the centuries that had passed since men used it, but the mark of its builders remained in that no trees had been able to root themselves in its massive paving.

We trudged on till near on nightfall, and camped by a line of deeper green in the long grass, where a spring oozed up from among the roots of a great tree to trickle away and lose itself to southward. It was Bent, I think, who tempted fate by remarking that we were unusually lucky in meeting neither savages nor anything more disagreeable and dangerous than snakes. There was a yellowish-green, hooded kind of snake of which we had already killed nearly a dozen since entering the jungle, of which, Watkins told us, the bite was certain death. So far, it was our only enemy.

Not that the land was deserted—far from it. That night, as I lay by the fire, the noises of the wild kept me long awake. I heard Bent's placid breathing—he lay next to me, and Watkins beyond him—only at intervals, for there was the squealing and chattering of monkeys not far off, and the many cries of settling birds, until it was quite dark. Later there were grunts and roars and squealings—back toward the jungle we had left I heard the succession of noises that told how a tiger had made his kill, and until I went to sleep the bleating of antelope kids and the howls of jackals troubled the night. We were in a hunter's paradise, it seemed.

I wakened early, and dozed again till dawn. We had for covering a seven by six waterproof sheet apiece, with a lining of fleece. It was very light to carry, and in that climate quite enough for warmth as well as full protection from the heavy dews. Wakening fully when the day had come, I threw off my covering and sat up. Watkins was rubbing his eyes and yawning, but Bent lay on his back, very still.

I stared at him, wondering if it were an effect of the light that made his face seem so pale beneath the tan of exposure. Even his lips looked pale and bloodless, and there was a chalky appearance about his cheeks that normally were so healthily tinged beneath their tan. I leaned toward him, and his breathing was faint as an infant's.

"Bent!" I called.

He did not stir. Watkins sat up on his side and leaned over the sleeper. I saw him pull back the collar of Bent's shirt and bend down close to his neck, and then he looked up at me.

"Get a fire going as soon as you can," he bade, speaking so as not to rouse Bent. "We must boil him up some sort of soup—he's had his veins drained by a vampire bat."

I needed no second bidding, but had our tin can on a fire as quickly as possible, and chopped up a leg of buck that Watkins had shot the day before, to simmer and make soup. We left Bent to sleep until a rich liquid had simmered out from the meat, and then Watkins wakened him

—he was weakly surprised at his own inability to sit up straight.

This, our first set-back, cost us three days. We rigged a sort of shelter for Bent, and, after the first day, gave him a twig to keep the flies off himself while we tended camp and amused ourselves as best we could. Watkins went searching vainly for a weed from which—so he said—he could make a tolerable substitute for tobacco, of which we had none left. I went shooting for the pot, an easy business, since the wild things here had never faced a gun before, and I think many of them had never even encountered man.

No incident of those days is worth record; on the morning of the fourth day we went on, Watkins and I carrying all Bent's gear, and even then our convalescent found it hard to keep pace with us. Two tiny punctures already nearly healed, in the left side of his neck, were all that he had to show; had it not been for Watkins' knowledge of the cause of his weakness he might have died, for it was my first experience of such a danger as this, though I knew the country was not innocent of vampire bats.

I HAVE said that, from where we camped, the trace of the ancient road led on to a rise that hid what lay beyond. On the fourth day, in spite of Bent's weakness, we went up to the crest of that rise and paused, for there the road ceased. There, it seemed, the way to Kir-Asa ended.

Abruptly, as we topped the rise, a great gulf yawned before us, its brink less than a dozen paces from the crest of the long ascent. It ran transversely to the line of our approach, and the farther cliff was not less than a hundred yards distant from where we stood. I can think of no better simile for that tremendous gorge than that it was as if some giant had taken a colossal wedge and split the rock foundations of the world as a woodman might split a tree.

From behind us the westering sun shone on the upper part of the gulf's far wall; in the mother-rock were streaks of quartz and mica, so that the cliff looked like a mighty jewelled mosaic wrought by the hands of gods. To southward the chasm ran unbroken, precipice-walled, as far as eye could reach; to the north, it went to a horizon of tumbled, jagged rocks, from among which little pillars of smoke went up here and there. And beyond the cliff in front of us rose a heavier smoke pillar, the one we had seen for miles back along our way, though now as we stood at gaze the crater that sent it forth was still hidden by the great ravine's far edge.

Watkins went forward to the brink of the cliff and looked over—while he leaned and looked into the gulf my heart stood still and I wanted to call out to him, but dared not speak. He turned and beckoned to me.

"Come and see what you think of it, Faulkner," he bade.

So I went, nine paces of the dozen walking and the other three on my hands and knees, for from where we had been standing the ground fell a matter of six feet or so, to the edge where Watkins stood so unconcernedly.

I crawled to the edge.

"Hold my feet, Watkins," I asked.

He promptly sat on my calves, grinning in his infernally cool way, and, so secured, I got my head over the cliff edge and looked down. I saw that though at the top the walls of the chasm seemed perpendicular, yet the cleft appeared to narrow as it went down to a dimness where—I judged it somewhere between five and eight hundred feet—the daylight failed to penetrate. Yet, in spite of this impression—or illusion—of less width of cleavage in the depths, the rock face down which I looked went sheer away until lost in obscurity. And faint and far down I could hear the splash of running water, while it seemed to me that a mist clouded the darkness into which I gazed.

I drew back, and Watkins, releasing my legs, crawled up again to where Bent sat waiting the fruits of our investigation. Watkins followed me slowly, and glancing back at the gulf.

"What I want to know," Bent said peevishly, "is what breed of fool built a road like that to a hole like this."

Watkins pointed across to the farther cliff, and there at its edge a curved depression showed, like the hump of a macadamised road seen in section. It was opposite and corresponding with the trace of the way we had followed.

"This gulf has been made by an earthquake, or some convulsion, since the road was built," he said. "When the road was laid down it went straight westward from Kir-Asa to the coast. But our main problem is not how the road was made—we have to join up with the other end of it over there—the problem is how to cross this."

And, with a gesture, he indicated the great chasm that barred our way.

SINCE Bent was still weak from loss of blood, we agreed to camp without trying to push on farther that day. We had had a drink and refilled our water-bottles at a spring I found three or four miles back—it was a trickle similar to that by which we had made our preceding camp. With nearly a quart of water apiece, and the cool of the evening coming, we counted ourselves safe as regards thirst, so we moved back about a quarter of a mile from the ridge to a clump of trees, and there built us a fire to cook the half haunch of buck that remained to us for food. Watkins was much concerned about the absence of vegetable food, I remember.

"We shall all get scurfy and pimply and evil-tempered," he declared. "An unrelieved meat diet is simply damnation, and since we got out of the jungle we've had nothing else."

We had got our fire going, and chunks of the half haunch were grilling, when he made this announcement. I was bending over the fire, attending to the meat, and Bent lay a little way off, stretched at full length with his face upturned to the sky. It wanted then about half an hour of sunset, as nearly as I could judge—Watkins had the only watch that would keep good time; mine had gone wrong down in the marshes and Bent's gained time so that he was forever setting it by Watkins. Still, on a trip like this, the exact time was not of much consequence.

As I bent over the fire, something came past my ear—psst!—into the heart of the flames. I saw Watkins leap for a rifle and work the bolt to drive a cartridge from magazine to barrel-chamber, and then he lifted the rifle and fired so closely past me that the explosion almost stunned me. Again he fired, and yet again, and then, still holding the rifle, he began to run.

It had all passed so quickly that he was charging past me before I had recovered from the shock of his first shot, and before Bent could get on his feet. When I had straightened myself and looked around, I saw two grotesque figures on the ground, about fifty yards away toward the great chasm, and Watkins was chasing a third who had nearly reached the crest of the ridge. Up there, at the edge of the ridge, this third figure turned as if awaiting its pursuer, with what looked like a slender stick raised to its face.

Watkins, whom I knew to be a splendid shot with a rifle, stopped to fire again; the figure on the ridge tottered, dropped its stick, then turned and disappeared toward the chasm. Either its arm was broken by the shot, or else the shoulder blade was damaged, for as it turned its arm that had held the stick fell and dangled uselessly. That it could still take to flight in spite of the terrific shock such a wound must involve spoke volumes for the physique of these beings who had come on us.

I followed, as quickly as possible, with the second rifle, leaving Bent to his own inclinations—I confess to having had a hope that, semi-invalid as he was, he would stay and look to the grilling of our steaks. Watkins disappeared over the crest of the ridge, and as I came up to sight of the chasm I heard his rifle bark again, but hollowly and faintly. In a few seconds an echo of the shot was flung back by the farther cliff, and then the two rock walls tossed the sound back and forth between themselves till it sounded like the rattle of marbles on a pavement, and finally died away. But of Watkins I could see nothing.

The point to which the figure he pursued had fled was three or four hundred yards to the left of that from which we had looked down into the depths. I went down gingerly from the ridge, and in fear and trembling lay flat and looked over. The mystery of Watkins' disappearance explained itself at once. A little ledge, some eighteen inches or less in width, ran steeply down the cliff face, forming a sort of path; about thirty yards down that path Watkins was kneeling, looking into the depths as unconcernedly as if he looked out of a ground-floor window in a suburban villa.

"Hullo!" I called.

He looked up at me. "It's a hell of a way down," he called back. "I ought to have heard him crash when he bounced on the floor down there, but never a sound came back. Hold on—I'm coming up again."

I drew back from the edge and waited, but it was fully a quarter of an hour before he came up, looking very thoughtful. We went back together toward our fire, and I felt grateful to Bent for having, as I had hoped, stayed to see to the cooking. He explained later that we had the two rifles, and as far as he could see we were two to one, so he judged that in his weak state he would be of little use to us—unless we called to him to come and take a hand.

We two stopped beside the second of the wild men whom Watkins had shot—the

one farthest from our fire. He was a being streaked with paint, with a necklace of bones, and a slender tube—a blowpipe—dropped beside the recumbent figure. One hand was twitching feebly, and as my shadow fell across the man his eyes opened and glared up at me. He spat out some sentence that sounded weakly fierce, and even as he spoke drew up his limbs in a final convulsion, and so died. I looked at Watkins.

"What did he say?" I asked.

Watkins shook his head. "I don't know the language," he confessed. "It isn't any dialect of the Pacific that I've ever heard—sounds more like a jargon derived from Aryan roots. I seemed to get two words—one was either 'vengeance' or 'expiation,' according to the context, and the other was 'ghosts' or perhaps 'shadows'—it may have been a curse at you because your shadow fell on him."

He prodded the corpse with his foot, indifferently, as if it had been that of a rat.

"We've had a narrow squeak," I said. "If it hadn't been for your marvellous shooting...."

"I knew we simply had to bag all three," he answered, almost apologetically. "If that beggar I chased had got away, he might have brought a whole tribe down on us. Your escape, by the way, was a miracle. That arrow that went into the fire instead of into you would have put paid to your account in about ten minutes—these chaps all tip their arrow with the same sort of poison, no matter what dialect they speak. Let's go and get some grub, unless Bent has frizzled the steaks to cinders."

WE WENT back to the fire, and saw as we passed that the other man, whom Watkins had shot first, was quite dead—the expanding bullet had taken him just under the eye, and, as is the way with that sort of ammunition, in its exit had blown the back of his skull away.

"After grub," Watkins said, "we'd better tumble these chaps over the cliff, or else the jackals will give us no sleep to-night."

It was a gruesome thought, but our appetites suffered not at all because of it. We polished off the meat, wiped our hands on the grass, had a sparing drink apiece from our water-bottles, and then Watkins and I lugged the two carcasses to the top of the ridge and sent them rolling down. We agreed between ourselves, now that human enemies had put in an appearance, that it was not enough protection merely to keep up a good fire. Between us we would keep four-hour watches, letting Bent sleep the night through, since he had not completely recovered from his loss of blood. We spun a knife for choice of watches, and Watkins calling "Point!" won, since the knife came down handle first. Then we went back to our fire, and threw into it the little satchels of poisoned arrows and the blow-pipes, which we had not sent over the cliff with the bodies of their owners. There were a couple of spears which we let lie where they had fallen, half-hidden in the grass.

I settled down beside Bent, who slept soundly, as Watkins had elected to take the first watch. It was then hardly dark, and though the day had been tiring enough sleep was not for me. I could see Watkins sitting with the firelight on him, gazing toward the ridge; as I watched him, he got up and paced back and forth restlessly—he seemed, from what the glow of the fire showed me of his face, perplexed over some problem, for he frowned and shook his head at times.

So we alternated between sitting and pacing up and down until moonrise, and then I must have dozed. The moon was but a little way up from the horizon when he wakened me to take my turn at watching.

Our precaution, though wise, proved needless, for nothing more came to disturb us. Our fire kept off jackals and other prowling beasts, and the three wild men we had killed—or rather, Watkins had killed—had no followers, as far as we were concerned. When it was time I roused Watkins again, and this time slept without difficulty until after sunrise.

And there sat Watkins, frowning as he gazed into the fire. He looked at me and smiled as I sat up.

"I've been thinking," he announced. "Last night, chasing that savage, I found what I came to find, and now I'm wondering whether to go on or turn back."

I stared, wondering at his words. In the end he laughed.

"I'm quite sane," he said. "Down that ledge there's a sort of cave or recess in the rock. In the cave there are some bones and an inscription scratched on the rock."

"Well?" I asked, mystified not only at the existence of a readable inscription in such a spot as this, but at its possible connection with the man before me.

"You asked, some days ago," he said deliberately, "about our being first to come this way, and I told you I was not sure

about our being first. I had an idea that a relative of mine had preceded us, and last night I found all that was left of him. But what he's left—what he scrawled on the rock—makes me curious, and I feel inclined to go on, down the cliff."

"Down that ledge?" I asked incredulously.

He nodded. "It's not nearly so bad as it looks," he said.

Now—it is a weakness that I share with most men, I believe—I hated to confess that I was horribly afraid even of looking over the cliff, but it seemed that the alternatives lay between confession of my fears and actually setting foot on that perilously narrow ledge. Mentally, I postponed the confession.

"I suggest that you come and see the statement of my ancestor, so as to assure yourself that I'm not guying you," Watkins said. "And when we can come back, we'll tell Bent all about it, and decide among ourselves whether to go on or to go back. It won't take more than half an hour, and we can leave Bent to sleep until we get back here."

SITTING comfortably there by the fire, well out of sight of those tremendous cliffs, I had a sudden access of courage. I told myself that if Watkins could crawl about that cliff like a fly going down a wall, I'd be hanged if I wouldn't screw myself up to doing likewise.

"Right," I said, and I fancy the ready acceptance of his proposal surprised him, since he must have known when he sat on my legs what it meant to me even to look down into the gulf. "Let's start now." For I wanted to get it over before my fit of bravery evaporated.

So we set out. By screwing up my resolution I managed to keep on my feet when we got to the brink of the cliff, and Watkins, preceding me, gave me a hand until I was safely on the sloping edge that made so dizzy a pathway.

"Don't look down," he bade—needlessly enough, for I dared not. "Keep your eyes on where your feet must tread, and try and think of any funny stories you know."

But all I could get in my mind was that, to be grammatically correct, he should have said "try to think," not "try and think." I was about to tell him this when he came to the cave or recess in the rock wall of which he had spoken. It was a cleft like an inverted V with a flat floor on which was a confusion of bones—a skull among them, minus the lower jawbone—and some rusted bits of metal, including the barrel and trigger mechanism of what I took to be an old muzzle-loader. There was, too, a rusty bone-handled knife, and there were some mouldering rags, and a couple of bone buttons. Here some civilized man had come to his end.

Watkins, without speaking, pointed at the right-hand wall as we faced inward to the cleft, and I read what had been scratched—I judged with some metal implement—in the soft rock. I transcribed the message from the penciled copy that Watkins made then and there:

"RECORD CONCERNING IOHN WATKYNS, HERMAN ROEDERER, CORNELIUS VAN VUUREN, DIRK VAN DEN HEUVEL, PETER SLUYS, AUTUMN 1768. IN APRIL 1766 WE FIVE CAME SEARCHING FOR KIR ASA. PETER SLUYS WAS BIT BY A SERPENT IN THE FOREST AND WE BERIED HIM. BY GODD HIS MERCY WE PASSED THE TREMBLING BRIDGE THAT IS IN THIS GULPH AND CLIMBED TO THE PLACE WHERE GHOSTS CHASE WOMEN. SO IT IS NAMED. ALSO WE PASSED NANTIA THE WOMAN WHO RULES MONKEYS AND FOR MONTHS WERE PRISONERS IN THE LAND OF KIR ASA BEYOND THE WALL. THIS YEAR BEING FREED WE FLEDD AND RETURNED TAKING NOTHING OF THE PLACE BUT GLADD OF OUR LIVES.

"HERMAN ROEDERER AND DIRK VAN DEN HEUVEL WERE TORN IN PIECES OF THE MONKEYS RULED BY NANTIA. CORNELIUS VAN VUUREN ATE OF FISH HE CAUGHT IN THE RIVER THAT IS DOWN IN THE GULPH AND DIED MISERABLY AND I BERIED HIM. I IOHN WATKYNS HAVE CRAWLED HITHER FROM THE GULPH HAVING BROKEN MY LEG BY THE ANKEL AFTER THAT I HAD PASSED THE TREMBLING BRIDGE. MY POWDER IS SPENT AND MY STRENGTH AND HERE I SHALL DIE COMENDING MY SOUL TO MY MAKER.

"TO ANY WHO FOLLOW—SEEK OUT PHILIP WATKYNS OR SEND HIM MESSAGE TO CLIFFE BY ROCHESTER IN KENT THAT IS IN ENGLAND TO TELL HIM HIS BROTHER IOHN MET DEATH WITH XTIAN FORTITUDE FOR I KNOW THAT HERE I DIE ALONE. AND IF YOU FOLLOWING FOLLOW TO KIR ASA KILL NANTIA WHO RUES MONKEYS. I COMMEND MY SOUL TO GODD THOUGH MY BODDY WILL BE TORN OF BEASTS FOR HERE I DIE ALONE NOT HAVING POWDER OR STRENGTH TO FACE THE WILD

BEESTS THAT ROAM THE PLAIN AND WITH NOUGHT MORE TO EAT. IOHN WATKYNS OF CLIFFE BY ROCHESTER IN KENT."

Watkins finished his transcription, kneeling to read what was inscribed near down to the ground. I picked up the rusty knife and saw how, apart from corrosion, its point was worn down. With this tool "Iohn Watkyns" had inscribed his story on the stone, and the awful fate that the story pictured appalled me. Somehow this iron-nerved man had dragged himself up from the "Gulph" with a broken ankle, and here he had set himself to make this record in the knowledge that, foodless and disabled, he must wait here until pain and starvation left a lifeless body for the jackals.

Watkins, taking off his coat and spreading it on the floor of the cave, began picking up the bones that lay scattered about and placing them on the coat. I gave him a hand, and when we had them all picked up he took up the coat.

"Let's get back," he said. "This was a brave man, and we'll do him all the honour we can by burying his remains decently. We can talk about his message outside—I don't feel like it, here."

"Neither do I," I confessed. And so, Watkins carrying the bones wrapped in his coat, we made our way up to the top of the cliff. But, either because of the deep impression made on me by the writing in the cave, or because a danger faced is never so great as a danger anticipated, I thought far less of walking up the ledge that had cost me so much resolution to descend.

THE bones that had been "Iohn Watkyns" were decently and reverently buried at a little distance from the top of the cliff, and we three sat round the ashes of our fire, which we had let die down. Watkins had intimated to Bent that he wished to have a talk before moving on, and Bent and I sat waiting while he arranged in his own mind what he wished to say and discuss. At last he began.

"When I bargained with you two," he said, "I told you that my object was hunting and exploration, and that I had a yarn from an old Dyak about Kir-Asa. That was all true, but it was not all the truth. Back there where men are plentiful I had no wish to tell more than would get me two good men as companions on a trip like this, because—well, apart from all else, Kir-Asa may be really worth finding."

Here he paused. I saw that Bent, nursing his knees, rested his chin on them and looked hard at Watkins. He had grown very silent, had Bent, since the incident of the vampire bat, and it seemed to me that he was hardly as grateful as he might have been for the consideration—even solicitude—that Watkins showed him.

"Now," Watkins went on, "I've always had a liking for antiquities, and stories of strange places, but it was not till my father died that I had any opportunity of indulging my likings—I earned my own living from Darjeeling to Hong-Kong, and from there to Penang, and pretty much all over the islands. That's not the story, though. Away at my home there's a faded old manuscript diary that my grandfather's great-grandfather kept. There's not much in it of interest concerning him—his name was Philip Watkins, and he lived at a place called Cliffe, in north Kent."

"It seems to me," Bent said, as Watkins paused in his recital, "that you're merely telling family history. I mean—this hardly concerns us."

Watkins looked across at him. "When you're a little older, and a little wiser, Bent," he said coldly, "you'll also be a little more patient. I'm not telling these details without reason—they link up with the grave we dug and the bones we buried—while you were resting—an hour or two ago."

"Oh, well," Bent said carelessly, "I apologise. Go on."

"Bent," Watkins said, and the word sounded like the snap of a steel trap, "I don't take apologies that veil mere contempt or lack of interest. What I have to say involves a decision as to whether we go on or go back from here. I'm talking with a purpose, not to develop my lungs."

There was some hint of the latent power in the man as he fixed and beat down Bent's gaze. I found my admiration of him growing yet more—it had been growing all the way from the coast.

"I'm sorry," Bent said, with more of conviction in the words, "and—I'm listening."

"But Philip Watkins' diary," Watkins went on after a pause for thought, "had one interesting portion, which told of a brother, John Watkins, who came home from service with the old John Company, and brought back a story of a place called Kir-Asa. I'm not going to detail that story to you two now—it's too incredible. But, on the strength of the story, John borrowed five hundred pounds from his brother and

came east again. Here he either hired or took into partnership four Dutchmen, and Philip got a letter giving the names of the four and saying they were starting with John from Batavia. And that was the last Philip ever heard of his brother.

"When I came East, I brought the knowledge of John's starting out, and brought in my mind all he had told Philip of the nature of the adventure he contemplated. But it was not till a little over a year ago that I could get any mention of a place called Kir-Asa anywhere, and then I came on an old Dyak—you both know that part of the story. His directions brought us here, and less than a mile from here, Bent, I found the end of the story of John Watkins, together with his bones—Faulkner knows it. It was scratched on the side of a cave in which John Watkins died, and I'll read it out as I copied it in the cave this morning."

He read the pathetic inscription very slowly, and Bent listened intently. As he paused at the end, Bent put in:

"And now you intend to decide whether to finish here or go on?"

"Not yet," Watkins answered. "I intend first to weigh up this message sentence by sentence, discuss it thoroughly, and then take the opinion of you two as to what we ought to do, though I think I'm pretty fully decided myself, already. But if you two don't agree—if you're both of one mind against me—well, it's too serious and perhaps dangerous a matter for any but a majority decision to take us on."

He took up the copy of "Iohn Watkyns' " record again and studied it. "First of all," he said, "assuming that we go on, we've got to get through that cleft in the earth—up and down the cliffs. We can save ourselves the trouble of searching for any other route—John Watkins and his party must have searched both ways of the cleft to see if they could get round it before going the way they did, and that's the best, if not the only way. Agreed?"

"Agreed," I said, and: "Assuming that we go on," Bent remarked.

"We can tackle the trembling bridge, and what he calls 'the place where ghosts chase women,' when we come to them, as the record does not describe them in any way that would help us in preparing ourselves. Thus we needn't discuss them till we know a little more about them. Agreed?"

To this we both assented without hesitation or comment.

"As for Nantia and her monkeys, old age has probably done her in and saved us any trouble, but it strikes me as a sort of guard over the place that may have been replaced or kept up—a big danger. That control of animals, when it exists among savages, runs in families and is generally handed down, and there's nothing more terrible to face than a troop—or whatever the collective word is—of big monkeys. It's something to watch and save revolver ammunition for, but since John's party got through without damage, one way, with far less efficient equipment than breech-loading pistols, I don't see why we shouldn't get through."

"If we go on, I agree," Bent said.

"All this is assuming that we do go on," Watkins said calmly, though I could see that the calm hid irritation. "Now, beyond the monkeys, the party that preceded us were taken prisoners, but were not harmed. That stamps the people who took them prisoners as something more than ordinary savages, who usually kill their prisoners after more or less torture—there's a hint of trouble in their being glad to get away with their lives, but they did get away. Further, as I read it, they left behind something that would have been worth bringing with them—'taking nothing of the place'—the record states, showing that there was something to take."

HE PAUSED and looked at us questioningly. We both nodded assent.

"As to the disasters of the return journey, we can't blame Kir-Asa for them," he suggested.

"I conclude Nantia's monkeys belong to Kir-Asa," I said, "and if so Kir-Asa is to blame."

"If we go on," he said, "we shall find out about that. Now, as to whether we go on or no, I've summed up all the record tells us. For myself, I think we're forewarned to a certain extent, and there's a chance of making good over our findings. At the worst, we shall probably have as good a chance of getting away as had the party before us, and at the best we may come back very rich men. And—I hate giving up a thing once I've begun it."

"Watkins," I asked, "what is Kir-Asa?"

"I know very little," he answered frankly. "Philip's diary that I spoke of—you must remember that it was written about a century and a half ago—tells the fantastic tales that came from the East in those days. But I judge it to be a very old city or place, Atlantean, perhaps, or even a

survivial from Lemuria, the continent that was before Atlantis.

"It may be just a relic of an Eastern state only a few hundred years old, though what we saw of the surface of the road points to something far greater. By what Philip's diary tells, there are traces of Lemuria about the place—uncanny traces—but what he wrote, which is what his brother told him, may be only travelers' tales. As to what Kir-Asa is, my own inclination is to go and find out."

"And mine," Bent said slowly, "is exactly the reverse."

"Well," Watkins commented, "perhaps you're wise. But since you're the youngest member of the party, and volunteered your decision before Faulkner had a chance to speak, perhaps you'll state your reasons fully."

"I believe," Bent said, choosing his words with care, "that your ancestor was rather delirious with pain from his broken leg when he cut that record in the rock. His story of a place where ghosts chase women, and of a woman who could rule a herd of monkeys, goes a long way beyond probability. He says nothing definite about anything at Kir-Asa to make the expedition worth while, and I don't like the idea of risking my neck on those cliffs, since it appears there's no avoiding them if we go on, without some better prospect of a real profit accruing. It looks to me like a series of very grave dangers for the sake of what you yourself have owned may be only travelers' tales."

"There's one bit of evidence to the contrary that I haven't mentioned," Watkins said, "and that's the sentence spoken by the man I shot last night—you remember, Faulkner, when your shadow fell on him. It was nothing like the ordinary dialects of the Pacific, and it pointed to the existence in these parts of a totally different kind of race. In the same way as my ancestor's imprisonment without harm of any kind points to the existence of some sort of civilization, as distinct from the savage sort of life you generally find about this quarter of the world."

"Proves nothing, with regard to Kir-Asa," Bent said doggedly. "Apart from the bit of road you uncovered, there's no real evidence."

Watkins turned toward me. "Faulkner—the casting vote?" he asked.

I think he knew what it would be. "I'm for going on," I said. "If you turned back now, I should be forever hungering to come along this road again and find out what it was that we perhaps had missed."

After this there was a long silence between us, broken in the end by Bent.

"Well," he said, "what shall we do about it?"

There was a hint of obstinacy in the manner of the question, as if he feared coercion and would resist it. Watkins considered his words very carefully in replying.

"Bent," he said, "when we started on this trip you knew quite well it was no week-end excursion to a seaside resort, but a difficult and possibly dangerous task. I gave you to understand that much, as I did with Faulkner—when I bargained for your services. For my part I looked to get two sound men who would follow through any hells there are to reach our objective."

"Your yourself have owned that the objective is not only vague," Bent interrupted, "but quite possibly nonexistent. It's a quest of shadows."

"And does that matter two halves of a damn to you, under the terms of our agreement?" Watkins asked, suddenly exploding out of his usual calm. "On a trip like this anything short of absolute concord may spell disaster at any minute—one must lead, and it is for the others to fall in with the leading, so long as it's fair and just. Your attitude breaks the concord, spoils leading. The fact that I, the leader, think it better to go on than to leave the possibilities unexplored ought to be enough for you, if what you said when you agreed to come counts for anything."

"Frankly," Bent said, "I don't like the look of the thing. It's as I said, a quest of shadows, a maximum of risk with a minimum possibility of profit."

"Look here," Watkins suggested. "Subject to Faulkner's approval, we two will come back with you though the jungle to the edge of the marsh, back down to the low country where we began to cut a way. You can take either the shot-gun or a rifle, make your way to the coast, and take the boat—you can work it on your own easily enough—and we'll find a way to get off the coast when the time comes for us to want to. That lets you out, we two can go on, and everybody's satisfied."

Whether the proposal shamed Bent out of his attitude, or whether he feared to cross the marsh alone, I do not know. But he shook his head at the proposal.

"No," she said, "the voting was two to one, and I abide by it. I merely stated my objections, and my views, but they're overruled. With me it's more a premonition

of no good to come out of it than anything else—I'll come with you to Kir-Asa."

Watkins reached out his hand, and Bent took it.

"I'm glad we've talked it out and cleared the air," Watkins said. "We can only tackle a problem like this in absolute agreement—there must be no divided opinions about it. And now it's settled—we go on."

We decided to make a day on the plain, shooting and cutting up for the pot, since it was pretty evident that the chasm would provide nothing in the way of food, and we did not know if it would take hours or days to reach the top of the farther cliff.

At noon, when the sun shone directly into the cleft, Watkins and I went and looked over the cliff edge; we saw, down in the depths, tumbling masses of pearl-grey clouds, which hid the floor of the ravine and prevented us from making any estimate of its depth, and again we could hear faintly the sound of water falling.

Beyond these things, our scrutiny added nothing to our knowledge of what we had to face. We knew that John Watkins had crawled up the cliff face to the little cave, if his "record" told truth, while we ourselves had found a way down from the edge to the cave. There was our path—no need to search for another.

Next morning, well stocked with cooked meat, we were ready to face the descent of the cliff.

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE WHERE GHOSTS CHASE WOMEN

THINKING over the inscription in the cave, as I lay wakeful at dawn of the morning when we were to begin our descent of the cliff, I divided the obstacles between us and Kir-Asa into three definite barriers. There was, first and nearest, the trembling bridge, whatever that might be; then came the "place where ghosts chase women," which would not have induced mention in John Watkins' record merely through the grotesqueness of the name, but was put down as something to be passed or overcome. And, lastly, there would quite possibly be the descendants of Nantia's monkeys.

As I lay there meditating, Watkins sat up. There is no disguising the fact that he was an ugly man. Squab nosed, and with a chin that gave no hint of his strength of character, just as his flat chest and rather sloping shoulders concealed great physical strength, he looked monkeyish, sitting there, for he was one of whose good qualities his friends (and I am proud to have been one of them) had to learn; he displayed none on first acquaintance.

In a few minutes we made up the fire and breakfasted. Packing our limited belongings had become an automatic business, and when it was over we faced east. It seemed, that morning, as if all our journey so far had been a mere introduction, the overture before the rising of the curtain. There was a sense almost of solemnity about our setting out, and I remember turning to look back at the park-like, grove-spotted level of the plain, bathed as it was in the brilliant light of the early morning world. I think some similar feeling affected the others, for they too looked back and then set out without a word.

A little way on toward the ridge at the brink of the cliff, Watkins paused and picked up the broad-bladed spear of the savage he had shot. For two nights it had lain there unheeded in the grass; now he held it out toward me.

"Ever seen anything like that before?" he asked.

I took the spear by its shaft and looked closely at the blade. As I had last seen it, fresh dropped from its owner's hand, the dullness of the metal had led me to take it for the average native workmanship on poor quality steel, a thing with little temper except at the point, quite ordinary in pattern. But now I saw that the two nights of exposure to dew had not produced the red rust which one would expect to find; the metal had tarnished, and such slight traces of corrosion as it showed were more greenish than red.

"It's a nickel-copper alloy, or maybe tin or zinc," I said. "I'm no metallurgist."

"Neither am I," Watkins answered, "but the man who used this didn't trade in the bazaars of the coast towns. And, judging by the edge and the heft of the thing, they have a pretty taste in metals and the working of them where he came from."

"Copper-zinc alloy, well tempered, most probably," Bent put in, after looking closely at the blade.

I was about to drop the spear, but changed my mind. My rifle was slung on my back, military fashion, and this would form a sort of staff.

"May as well take it along," I remarked. "It might be useful, some time."

"Quite so," Watkins agreed. "In the same way, we might have brought along a

few tree trunks, just in case we find ourselves running short of firewood."

We crossed the ridge at the point opposite to where the ledge ran down the cliff face to the cave, and Watkins led the way down the short slope to the very edge. Before setting foot on the path which led to the cave of "Iohn Watkyns," and beyond it we knew not where, he unslung his rifle—it would have been difficult, if not impossible, on account of his pack, to get the weapon free for use in case of need while on the cliff path, unless this widened beyond the cave. I was about to follow his example, but he stopped me.

"If the path widens," he said, "there'll be plenty of room for you to get your gun loose when you want it. If it doesn't widen, only the front man of the party can shoot with safety."

"That reminds me," Bent said. "Those three savages you shot must have come this way, surely."

"They may have come any way," Watkins answered. "That breed travels miles on the hunt, in parties of anything between two and a dozen. The spear head points to their having come this way, though, as does the fact that one of them tried to escape down the cliff—though with regard to that, he may have just known of this ledge and thought I might be afraid to follow down it. The bones in the cave might easily make the path taboo."

With that he went on, stepping over the cliff edge to the perilous path as unconcernedly as one might step out of a doorway on to a city pavement. I followed more cautiously, and metaphorically held my breath lest I should shake the cliff.

ONCE over the edge, I turned to see if Bent needed a hand, realising that he had not yet seen the nature of the way we had to travel. Bent stepped down, I think, without realising what he was facing. Then he must have looked down into the depths.

"O Lord!" he cried. "I'd no idea it was like this."

"It isn't, really," I said, wonderfully strengthened in courage by the knowledge that somebody else was scared. "Keep your eyes on the path for footing—don't look down, and you'll find it easy enough."

We stopped at the cave, that Bent might see the record "Iohn Watkyns" had left. The rusty knife and the old gun barrel still lay there, together with the bone buttons and rags of clothing.

"If the savages know this path, how is it that these things were not taken away?" Bent asked, after he had read the inscription.

"I conclude," Watkins said, "that the path is used only at very rare intervals—it's not exactly the sort of road you'd use for a Sunday-school treat, or to bring your best girl for a walk on. The dead bones might have made the cave taboo, or else the things had rusted and rotted themselves useless before anyone came."

He led the way out again. "Anyhow," he said as he went, "if it hadn't been for those savages we should probably have missed the existence of this path, and of the inscription."

We followed him gingerly downward. The sun had climbed high enough to light the ravine to a considerable depth, and at the outset we had no difficulty of any kind—the path, though nerve-shaking enough, was at the same time of such a width that one could walk on it as long as one refrained from looking into the depths. The slope was not too steep for safety, and for a matter of four hundred paces or so we simply walked, thus dropping probably some sixty or eighty feet below our starting point. Here, however, the ledge narrowed to less than twelve inches in width, and became level. I heard Bent, behind me, give a little moan of fear, but dared not turn my head toward him. Watkins, from in front, called back "Stop" and I halted. Bent came up close to me and put a hand on my shoulder. I could feel him trembling.

"The path reverses here," Watkins said to me over his shoulder, "and I come back down under you. Don't move till I've passed you, and take the turn one at a time."

It was, as he said, a definite reversal of direction. The trace of the ledge on the side of the cliff was like the letter V laid on its side, and we were now at the point of the V. Watkins' head went past my waist as we two stood hugging the rock, and then I stepped forward, turned cautiously and followed him at the lower level. Bent in his turn moved forward, turned, and came on down the reversed path.

There were either nine or ten of these reversing points on that crazy track, which must have been cut for the use of people with stronger nerves than ours. It took us down from sunlight to shadow, and ever the sound of falling water grew, until it was a steady roar in the confines of the chasm. The last reversing point brought

us down to the level of thin, wreathing vapour, down to that point where the path had given foothold on clean solid rock. So near to the vertical was the cliff, and so smooth its surface, that from the summit to the level of this thin mist there was no sign of vegetation. But now the surface of the ledge, on which we must keep foothold, grew moist with a greenish, fungus-like coating, something like that which covers stones on a shore down near low-water mark, but fortunately not quite so slippery.

To that point, I had no doubt that the greater part of the ledge had been cut by human agency, perhaps by the builders of the great road, and perhaps by succeeding inhabitants of this land. Here and there a bit of natural inequality in the cliff face may have been utilised to save labour, but the steady angle of descent, together with the presence of the reversing points, proved the use of tools—and what a stupendous, age-long task it must have been, this of making a way to replace the broken road! I pictured a race at the height of its power, cutting this track in preparation for the making of a safe, wide roadway, and dying out before the task was completed, or being extinguished suddenly by catastrophic overthrow, conquest or disease, perhaps.

I have spoken of our coming to the point where the thin mist began as if it were a mere stepping down a slope, but it was far more. There were narrowings of that dizzy path where even Watkins clawed his way, face inward to the cliff and arms outstretched, the unslung rifle that he carried scraping on the stone. And at these points I went breathlessly and in deadly fear lest the next step should send me down to the invisible depths, until, by reason of successive strains of this kind, I got past fear to a sort of numb indifference.

At times I heard Bent make that sort of moaning sound with which he had first evidenced his realisation of the nature of our journey, and at one or two of the reversing stations I saw his face, chalk-white with fright—my own could not have been greatly different. Only the steady nerve of Watkins, leading the way and giving us an example of unflinching courage, rendered the descent possible; we two could never have got down alone.

Near the top the rock was reddish grey, streaked with dark lines that bespoke the presence of iron, and with here and there interminglings of quartz and what I took to be signs of mica. Lower down, we came to a thick layer of copper pyrites—I recognised it, though I am no metallurgist, by the golden gleam in the stone—and under that was a thick stratum of quartz resting on a still thicker layer of chalk. Beneath that again was a flinty-looking kind of rock, almost agate-coloured and slightly transparent, pitted small-pox-fashion with tiny holes.

These I remember, as well as a slanting vein of thick, pumic-like rock, which showed by its angle how volcanic action had at some time forced a channel through the earth-crust. There were other layers, including much of whitish, sparkling quartz—it was an object lesson in the making and settlement of the world's foundations, until at last we came to the unvarying green where the mist began.

It was then late afternoon, and we were all very hungry and very tired, but there was as yet no width of track on which we could rest. We went down into increasing dimness, and suddenly Watkins, with an "Ah!" of intense relief, stepped into such a recess as that in which we had found the bones, near the summit.

"We can rest and eat here," he said.

But first we drank, deeply, of our stores of water. Then, seated on the damp rock, we ate in the dimness. Here the roaring of water came to us as a great, persistent noise, over which we must raise our voices to make each other hear. We rested for half an hour or so, and light neither diminished nor increased; I was for staying at this point for the night, since the cave gave ample and safe sleeping room, but Watkins elected to go on.

"We can't find damper accommodation, and I'd rather get to level," he said. "Besides, we've nearly finished our water, and there's plenty down there—I'd rather finish the descent before we get thirsty again."

THUS we took to the path, which slanted steadily for another hundred feet of descent, and at that point Watkins was a mere ghost in the fog only three or four yards in front of me. Here, however, the ledge suddenly doubled its width, and I closed up on him; the surface grew irregular, as if natural rather than hewn, and we came on transverse fissures, some of them quite wide enough to trap an unwary foot.

"Go carefully," Watkins called back to us. "This must have been where my ancestor broke his ankle, though how he ever

There were scores of them . . . the maddest, most fantastic crew that ever troubled a nightmare. . . .

made his way to the top with it broken is a miracle."

Over that I wondered, and wonder still. Yet hope will carry a doomed man far, and probably the fear of falling off the ledge drove "Iohn Watkyns" up and up until he reached the shelter of the cave in which he died.

By this time the thunder of the invisible waters was almost deafening and quite near us. The mist wreathed and eddied in a current of air that swept along the gorge from south to north, so that at times there were tantalising half-glimpses of the rocks before and beneath us, and then again we were enveloped in the smoky, clammily warm whiteness of the fog curtain, through which our leader steadily groped his way.

We came suddenly to a level floor, boulder strewn; there was no longer a visible edge to the path toward the centre of the chasm, and the sound of falling water was very near indeed. The quality of the fog told us that it was still day overhead, and its whiteness made an unnatural, ghostly clearness of objects seen near at hand, though when the swirling masses thickened round us it was impossible to see clearly at a distance of six feet. Thus a boulder would seem to jump out of the reek as we came to it, and as suddenly would vanish behind, until, still following the line of the cliff, we found our way barred by a smooth, slanting wall of rock, down which trickles of water had worn tiny gullies.

Here Watkins turned at right angles, toward the centre of the chasm, though by this time the roar of the waters had grown so loud and obviously near that it seemed as if one more step would drop him into the invisible torrent. Suddenly he stopped, and I came abreast of him.

"The trembling bridge," he shouted, his lips close to my ear.

I peered forward, and in a momentary thinning of the mist saw that a great sheet of water poured over the slanting wall on our left, and fell, apparently far below the level of our feet, to the channel which the underground river had cut for itself in the floor of this mighty cleft. How deep the fall might be, or what was the width of the river, I could not tell, but the thunder of the cataract was majestic, its volume enhanced by the prisoning walls on either side.

Directly in front of the falling waters a mighty boulder, roughly oval in section, formed a bridge across the yawning gulf into which the waters fell. I can best describe it by saying that it was as if a slightly flattened torpedo had been placed with one end resting on each bank, only this torpedo was of stone, irregularly shaped, and with a sort of wing or fin projecting toward the waterfall from its main substance.

On this projecting fin a portion of the waters of the cataract fell, and, as the underside of the stone bridge was oval in section, the whole fabric perpetually rocked and trembled as the water falling on the projecting fin upset its balance. It was an unending fight between the waterfall and the balanced stone; the weight of water eternally sought to roll the great boulder in toward the face of the falls, and the boulder itself as perpetually regained its balance and held itself away, being bedded in a slight depression at either end so that it could not turn over.

The top of this trembling rock was about four feet in width, and at a level with my chest; I could not see it all, and could only tell vaguely what it was that caused the perpetual rocking and trembling; even when the swirling vapours were at their thinnest, only about eight or ten feet of this terrifying bridge were visible.

Whether beyond, in the obscurity of the mist, the surface was sufficiently flat to admit of our crossing we could not tell. We knew only that, according to his record, "Iohn Watkyns" and his companions had made the crossing—but that was a century and a half ago. Though the years had not worn away the projecting fin enough to stop the trembling and rocking movement, there was no telling what the water had done to the surface of the boulder in that period.

Bent saw the bridge, and I saw both anger and fear on his face.

"Do you think you're going to cross that?" he bellowed at Watkins.

"I know I am," Watkins roared back.

Bent shook his head, and half turned away irresolutely.

"Cross it, or go back up there alone and be damned to you!" Watkins yelled at him. And to that Bent made no reply.

WATKINS stepped to where a trickle of water came down the rock wall at the cataract's edge, made a cup of his hands, and held them to the trickle. At the touch of the water he almost jumped back—it was the first time I had seen him so startled as to give more than normal sign of surprise. I went up and put out a hand,

and the water was hot—not boiling, but past mere warmth; one could drink it with ease, as presently we did, but still it was hot. Somewhere higher up in its course this river came through an actively volcanic area, emerging from it as from some gigantic boiler, and now we knew why mist filled the lower levels of the gorge.

Without further speech Watkins made for the trembling bridge, and, as a boy might leap to gain the summit of a stone wall, with a jump landed on his stomach on the upper surface of the boulder. An unusually violent oscillation of the stone as a greater volume of water hit on its projecting fin pitched him off again, down beside us. He sat up, and I could see his lips moving as he swore.

In light acrobatic kit it might have been easy to mount and cross the boulder, but we were all weighted by our guns and ammunition and equipment. A second jump landed him back on the quivering, bucking stone, and flat on his stomach he straightened himself so that his head pointed across the gorge. He straddled his legs, and, propelling himself by a series of jerks, grew dim and vanished in the mist.

Beside that magnificent exhibition of courage the man who first swallowed an oyster was a rank and sorry coward. I felt my teeth chattering with fright, and knew that if I stood there much longer with Bent the last shades of my resolution would vanish. So I leaped for the trembling bridge as Watkins had leaped, spread myself flat on the top of the boulder, and began to impel myself toward the far side as he had done.

It was a matter of a couple of inches or so of progress at each impulsion, and the total distance could not have been less than thirty feet. I had no idea of whether the next jerk would land me down in the invisible torrent under me to meet a horrible death in the heated waters—I did not know whether Watkins had gone to the safety of the far bank or to extinction in the torrent. To the left of me was the vague white curtain of falling waters, beneath was the deafening thunder of the fall's impact, and as the varying volume of the cataract struck on the boulder's projecting fin it bucked and teetered under me until I prayed to encounter some knob or irregularity of surface that I might grip so as to lie still and recover my nerve.

The top of the boulder was wet and smooth, and there was nothing for it but to go on; one jerk of the stone, such as had thrown Watkins off at his first attempt to get on, nearly slid me off into the unseen depths, but I wormed a way back to what I judged was the centre and wriggled my way along, not knowing whether I was following Watkins to death in the hot river or to the safety of its far bank.

In the middle, opposite where the falling water struck on the projecting fin of stone, the warm spray drenched me through and through, and I spared a thought from my fears to hope that my waterproof matchcase was really so—it is odd how these little inconsequent thoughts come to relieve the mind in moments of stress. Out of the spatter of spray, I jerked my way along for a weary while, at intervals lying still to let the stone recover from an unusually heavy blow from the falling water.

As in coming down the cliff, my paroxysm of fear spent itself, leaving only the mechanical action of the mind that kept my limbs at work to propel me across, and at long last I heard a welcoming yell, felt the grip of Watkins' hand as he eased my tumble to firm hold on the floor of the gorge beside him. While I lay there, recovering from the quivering nervous state to which the passage of the bridge had reduced me, Bent's white face came out of the reek and he dropped down beside me. I could still hear the sobbing of his breath as he lay on the rock when such light as the mist permitted to reach us went out as if it had been turned off at a tap. There was no period of transition, but in a second we passed from mere gloom, in which we could distinguish each other's faces, to an impenetrable darkness, in which only the sense of touch, or the sound of our voices, could assure us of each other's presence.

My chief longing, there in the limit of darkness, was for something to smoke, I remember.

HOLDING on to each other, and guided by the roar of the cataract, we groped our way a few feet back from the brink of the river, and then sat touching each other to wait for light. It was like sitting blinded in a vapour bath; the heat from the river made a clammy moisture all about us, and we were soaked by the spray flung over the trembling bridge. I could feel moisture trickling down my face and under my clothes as I sat through the longest night it has ever been my luck to know.

We ate of our cooked meat, and from the

time of the meal until dawn none of us spoke, as far as I can remember—the roar of the waters made speech a burden, and we were spent and weary with the descent of the cliff and the passage of that appalling bridge.

The night was years long. I felt a sense of depression growing as it came toward dawn, as was only natural in the clammy, unhealthy heat. Only the wind blowing up toward the waterfall rendered the place bearable, and I judged that this wind was air sucked in toward where the volcanic heat, higher up the course of the river, made a vast boiler from which the stream emerged. That boiler was not always heated, though, for John Watkins' record told of how one of his companions had caught fish in this river.

Again, in all probability the volume of the torrent was far from constant; if such a mass of water as fell now had been striking on the projecting fin of the trembling bridge for a century and a half, it would have worn that fin away. Probably at times the stream was diminished to such an extent that the fall left the fin untouched. We had struck it at its worst, it seemed, for if the water had been cool enough for fish to live in it when John Watkins came, he must have missed the added danger involved by the steamy mists.

I had given up hope of ever getting out from that devil's cauldron when, as suddenly as it had left us, the light came back. It showed the mist as thinner; fully half of the restless rock over which we had come was visible, and I could see the spray flung off from its projecting point. I could see, too, a distance that I judged to be about twenty feet up the face of the fall, but the top of the cataract was higher than that—I could not see the brink. It was a smooth, unbroken sheet of foamy white against which the eddying vapours beat as the wind drove up the gorge.

We got up weakly, for the night spent in such steamy heat was utterly enervating. We went back from the brink of the stream for about twenty yards and found ourselves against the wall of the chasm, turned to the right, and stumbled forward. It was in Watkins' mind to follow the wall of the cliff until he came to a path corresponding to the one by which we had come down; since the track on the opposite cliff had been made by human agency he concluded that there would be a corresponding path on this side.

As we went on, the floor of the gorge grew more and more uneven; we had to climb over or work our way around boulders, step gingerly over clefts, and all the while search for the way upward. At last it showed, worn steps cut in the rock—what feet had worn down the edges of that stairway leading from danger to danger?

I counted as we went up, Watkins again leading, and there were two hundred and ten steps, leading out on to a broad incline over which the cliff jutted—it was a road nine or ten feet in width, so that men might walk abreast for its full width under an arch of stone. This brought us to a reversing point similar to those of the opposite cliff, and here we came clear of the mist into such light as could reach down to us, and, looking upward, saw that the earth above was sunlit. No words can tell how good it was to see, even from these depths, sunlight falling on the world again.

We were sodden and, out from the warmth of the mist, shivering with cold. Our uncut hair hung lank and dead about our corpse-like faces, and the moisture dripped from our fortnight-old beards as the water ran out from our boots. We were past all telling exhausted, but Watkins plodded doggedly on, round the broad reverse where the road was cut double-width into the rock, and we two toiled on after him.

A little way up from the reversing point the road narrowed until it was no more than the path on the opposite cliff, and Watkins took the lead and plodded upward. This wider portion, it seemed, had been the beginning of the greater work that the cutting of the narrow path foreshadowed, but those who hewed had been destroyed or driven away before the great task could be completed.

Since the preceding night we three had neither eaten nor drunk; we had filled our water-bottles at a pool on the floor of the gorge, first tasting the water to assure ourselves that it was drinkable, and finding it very slightly bitter, with a sulphury smell. For my part, I felt that the sight of the sodden cooked meat we carried would have sickened me. Watkins had a flask of concentrated meat lozenges as a sort of emergency ration, but since he did not judge this an occasion for using them it was not for me to suggest opening the flask.

We went on, and I was past fear, as I think was Bent. There came a time in that endless uphill trudge when I no

longer cared whether I went on or fell; I grew angry with Watkins, angry with myself for being angry with him, and very angry indeed with Bent over his disinclination to cross the trembling bridge. It was a weak sort of petulance which sought some object on which to vent itself, and there was none.

THE day grew older, and the sun came down to us. My feet ceased to leave wet marks on the rock pathway, and I could feel my clothes drying on me. At a little after noon we came to the last reversing point on the path, as I could see in turning. I could see, too, that the worst of the cliff journey was to come.

The angle of ascent was steeper—it was as if the people who cut this road had not quite settled in their minds what was to be the angle and what width was necessary, when they began here—and the path narrowed to no more than a foot in width. We had to face toward the rock and struggle along with held breath, in the knowledge that one false step would send us down to lie pulped beneath the mists from which we had climbed. The difficulty of that last bit roused all the fight that was in me; I had not come thus far, and risked life on the trembling bridge, to fail at the last. My teeth were still clenched with the desperate effort of balancing on the awful ledge with which the path ended when I came out on the level and fell exhausted beside Watkins on the grass.

That grass was long and soft; from the edge of the cliff the ground sloped downward for a yard or two to form a little pocket, into which I rolled. There, without even troubling to loosen the rifle slung on my back, I slept, utterly exhausted, and so quickly that I did not see whether Bent came out from the gulf.

At about an hour from sunset Watkins shook me awake. He had spread out his share of the cooked meat on the rubbered side of his waterproof sheet, all but a chunk which he was eating. It was whitish, uninviting-looking stuff after its soaking in the waters of the chasm, but Watkins chewed determinedly.

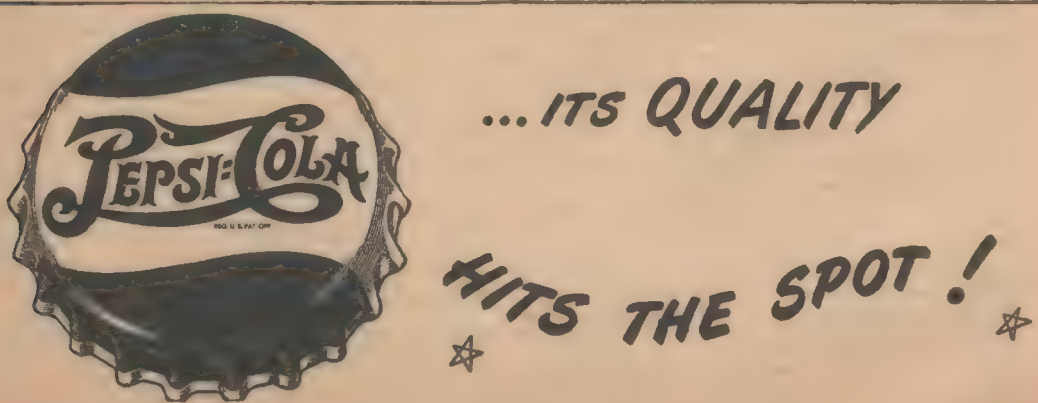
"Better tuck into yours," he advised. "If you don't, it'll be crawling away from you before morning. I've had a look over there"—he jerked his thumb over his shoulder, in our direction of travel—"and there's no firewood and nothing to shoot, as far as I can see. We'll clean up our gear and sleep where we are, out of sight of prowlers. Get your meat out and tuck in."

He had already wakened Bent, who sat up, staring across the great chasm—I could see that he regretted his decision. Moving stiffly, I unpacked my meat ration and forced down the greater part of it. I was aching in every joint, and, later, the movements necessary for cleaning my revolver and the rifle I carried proved actually painful, though doubtless they were good for me. Bent got through his share of the performance in sullen silence, and we let him sulk the fit out.

"Staying here," Watkins remarked as he rolled himself up in his waterproof sheet, "we are unsuspected by anyone on the track ahead—I put my head over the rise very carefully, but there was nothing in sight—it's a bare country. We'll have to get to game or starve tomorrow, but tomorrow can look after its own troubles."

With which bit of philosophy he curled himself up to sleep, and it being then just after sunset, I followed his example, as did Bent.

At dawn I was still stiff and obsessed with aches, but the rest had freshened me, and I felt that all I needed was a wash and a shave—which were out of the ques-



tion. Bent was awake, I saw, and sitting up; he looked less ill-tempered than on the preceding evening.

"Did you hear anything during the night?" he asked me.

I shook my head. "Nothing short of Gabriel's trumpet could have made me hear," I said.

"I thought I heard something like bare feet on the grass, and a sort of clucking noise," he said. "I sat up and looked round, but there was nothing to see."

"And we're untouched," I remarked. "Well . . ." and I unrolled the corner of the waterproof in which I had packed the remains of my meat. But it was not well; it went over the edge of the cliff without a moment's delay. I heard Watkins chuckle.

"You might have been kinder, and given it a chance to walk down, Faulkner," he remarked.

"It might have turned on me," I said.

Our toilet consisted of yawning, stretching, and rubbing our eyes, and then, as there was nothing to eat, we had but to pack kit to be ready for the road. So, while the shadows yet lay long on the grass, and before the sun had soaked up all the dew, we topped the rise and looked out on the next stage of our journey.

The cliff edge, by the aneroid, was over five thousand feet above sea level, and from before us the land fell away, entirely different in character from the country we had left on the far side of the gorge. It was hilly and broken, and we stood level with the tops of the highest hills; immediately in front of us a broad depression deepened gradually to form a valley between boundaries that were bare and sterile-looking, save for certain starved and stunted trees on the distant slopes. Away beyond the skyline the column of smoke that we had already seen appeared no nearer, and still there was a fold of ground between us and the crater that sent it forth. And there, running directly down the valley, was the trace of the great road.

We set out, following the trace of the buried road down the valley—even in this bare stretch it was buried under parched, arid soil, baked so hard that our boots left no marks. Save for a kite that sailed still-winged across the sky we saw no birds; on the ground were lizards and red woolly spiders here and there, and flies buzzed round our faces. There were no other signs of life. I wondered what the flies lived on, here, and whether the spiders and lizards lived on each other and so solved the problem of over-population of this waste land. Up at the level of the chasm, and in the park-like stretch we had left, the air had been fresh and cool, but soon, as we went down the valley, it grew dryly hot—and we had but half a bottle of water apiece. Because of the thirst they would engender, Watkins reserved his meat-extract lozenges, intending that we should resort to them at nightfall if by then we found no alternative food. We dropped down and down from the cliff level as the day grew, and the hills on either side walled us in.

At a little past noon we came to water, a trickle from under a rock to the left of the road that made green and weedy sward for about a hundred yards, before the earth that gave it took it back. With the point of the spear that I had stuck to even in crossing the trembling bridge I dug a hole in the ground, and we watched it fill, very slowly, from the spring, after we had finished the contents of our water-bottles. Watkins doled out two meat lozenges apiece; we had another drink, filled our water-bottles and traveled on, much refreshed.

THE way was aridly monotonous. The valley continued, still sloping downward, and the hills on either side dropped their level consistently with that of the valley floor. The aneroid registered a descent of eighteen hundred feet from the level of the great chasm's top when we determined on camping for the night, having seen nothing eatable and still seeing no indications of game of any kind. The place where we proposed to camp was a sort of widening of the valley down which the trace of the great road ran, and beyond it the valley narrowed as the hills on either side came so close to each other as to form a pass or defile. We were thus in a natural amphitheatre, in which were a score or more of great flat-topped boulders that looked as if giants had been throwing stones at each other. I suggested that we camp down under one of these.

"Better still, on one," Watkins amended. "It'll be no harder than the ground, and just in case visitors want to leave cards on us, we shall hear them coming up the garden path to the front door."

We had one more lozenge apiece, and a sparing drink to wash it down. Then we climbed, not easily, to the flat top of one of the great boulders, which would have slept a dozen of us and given room to

spare. I lay awake for a long time wondering over the possibility of finding food on the morrow, but dozed off just as a radiance in the sky betokened the coming of the moon. It seemed but a second before the clutch of Bent's hand on my shoulder wakened me, but, opening my eyes, I saw the half of the waning moon well above the hills.

"Listen!" Bent hissed in my ear. "Can you hear it?"

I heard quite clearly a sound as if at a distance liquid were clucking out from a bottle—I can liken the noise to nothing else. It seemed to come from the direction of the buried road at first, and then from the direction in which we were travelling. Watkins, on the other side of me, drew his rifle toward him and clicked a cartridge from the magazine to the barrel chamber as quietly as possible. Then he lifted his head cautiously, and after a minute sat up. At that I, too, sat up, rifle in hand, and Bent took two cartridges from his pocket and loaded our shotgun.

"What is it?" I whispered to Watkins, for the clucking, guggling sound seemed to be increasing in volume.

"Wait," he whispered back. "I can see nothing as yet. It's nothing dangerous, probably, or it would come more quietly. I rather think we're going to see something out of the ordinary."

I think I was first to see it, or rather them. From the shadows under the hills to the right of the road something emerged into the light of the moon, something bulky and vague. At the same time, from where the hills converged to form a defile, came other shapes. They came with such grotesque antics that at first I took them for some large breed of monkey, but as they neared where we sat I saw that they were taller than any monkey stands and they kept upright. Yet—how shall I put it?—I had a feeling that they were not men.

My hair bristled with sudden terror—bear in mind that all three of us had been subjected to a limit of strain in the past two days, and were faint from want of food—and I heard Watkins suck in his breath with a sort of hiss; he too was moved beyond the ordinary, though he knew more than I did of the nature of these things. They came toward us without sound of footsteps, and yet they leaped and ran and sometimes spun round each other like dead leaves. There were scores of them, the maddest, most fantastic crew that ever troubled a nightmare.

They ran round in dizzy circles, they advanced and retreated in twos and threes, ever nearing the boulder on which we sat rigid and unbelieving the sight that our eyes looked on. They were manlike in shape, but no men ever made humanity ludicrous as did these capering, guggling travesties. In the distance they had been impressive, but as they advanced into the open they became fearsomely absurd, hateful, and yet terrifying—it was as if they personified all the evil there is in the world, so that with them there came a sense of something demoniacal, polluting, utterly vicious. And as one leaping demon came within a score yards of us I nearly cried out; the moonlight showed him as indistinct in outline—there were no sharp contours against the light, but his edges were fuzzy, as if he were vignetted, or as if all round him the moon shone through thin fur.

In that particular, that ghostliness, haziness, as many as came near us were alike. I say as many as came near, for after the first score or so came others, scampering, clucking, devilish—the amphitheatre in the hills was alive with them, but it was a form of life that was most emphatically not human; it was inhuman in its capering glee, and we felt the presence of these things as that of something less than natural rather than supernatural. I felt myself bound from moving, as one is helpless in a dream, and fascinated, almost hypnotised, by the unceasing, whirling movements of these hazy shapes . . .

Crash! A charge of shot missed me by a miracle—Bent's trembling hand had inadvertently found the trigger of the loaded shot-gun that he held. At the flash and explosion the demons of the plain showed that they, too, knew what fear was. They ran faster than any man could run—they did not vanish, as would have vanished mere apparitions, but ran back into the shadows whence they had come, and in a couple of minutes the plain was empty.

"Was it—was it real?" I asked Watkins.

"I wouldn't believe what I read in that old diary," he answered slowly, "but it was true after all. And the writing in the cave—'the place where ghosts chase women'—this valley is that place."

He leaned over and tapped Bent on the shoulder. "Better put that gun down," he said. "You won't hit the ghosts, but it seems as if you might hit us."

"What are they, Watkins?" I asked again.

HE PULLED his waterproof sheet about him as he sat, and his sober, matter-of-fact air went far toward convincing me of my own sanity. "It's a long story, rather," he said, "and if I hadn't utterly disbelieved it I'd have told you before."

"It will pass the time if you tell me now—this is no place for sleep," I answered.

"It goes a long way back," he said, "out of historical times. You know the legend of Atlantis, the continent which is supposed to lie under the sea west of Africa?"

I nodded. "It's in Plato," Bent remarked.

"Exactly," Watkins agreed. "Well, Atlantis existed, thousands of years ago, with men on it like you and me. But before that—thousands of years before, probably—there was another continent where the Pacific rolls today—all these islands are its mountain tops and table-lands. There was no life as we know it—the world was new and just shaping itself, then."

"And these—these things—are survivals?" I questioned.

He did not answer the question directly. "On that first continent," he said, "there were reptiles and low animal forms of life, but man did not evolve out of them as Darwin and his school of thought claimed. Man is a spirit—man came to earth as a spirit. . . ."

"But. . . ." I interrupted, remembering the unspiritual way in which these things had bolted. Watkins held up his hand.

"Wait," he bade. "Imagine the soul of a baby in the body of a grown man, without the experience of earthly life that we call intellect. Imagine further that the grown body containing that baby soul is—what we have just seen—not solid, material stuff like ourselves, but something that tries to make itself material, just as the baby tries to make itself an intellect from the moment its eyes are opened. These things have been trying for countless centuries to make themselves material, and they have accreted to themselves a certain amount of solidity—they had to run—they couldn't vanish ghost-fashion.

"But—to go back—man came to earth an untaught spirit, only half of what we are to-day, a hazy, far from material shape—less tangible than these things, by a long way. They were solid enough to make noises we could hear, they were curious about us as monkeys or small children might be curious, afraid of us as small children might be afraid, which is why they came nearer only by degrees. And they were absolutely terrified by that gunshot noise."

"Half material," I said, "and not quite solid—I'm afraid I don't understand." As a matter of fact, it seemed to me rank nonsense.

"Astral," Watkins said—a word that had no meaning for me. "Survivals from Lemuria, as that first continent of all was called. You remember the Neanderthal man, and the Piltdown skull?"

I nodded. "I've heard of them," I said.

"Well, if you ever get a chance to look at the reconstructed Piltdown type, you'll see that it's virtually animal, and not man at all. It was the highest type of its day in the animal world, but still it was mere animal, nothing more.

"When man came to earth as a spirit, he made himself one with the Piltdown animal type, and from the blending of animal instinct and the spirituality that came to make man resulted intellect—you get in all the human race to-day a perpetual warring of the spirit against the flesh, the higher sense trying to conquer the lower instincts. That is typical of the blending—the amalgamation of the two parts of man, untaught soul and animal instinct, which together make for intellectual progression.

"The Piltdown type had the animal instinct, and grafting on to that the spirit produced thought, memory, intellect—the development of the soul. And the Lemurian ghost, as you may call it, had just as much need of the Piltdown brute as that had of the spirit, to produce man as he is now."

"But these things—they could never produce normal men, no matter what they were blended with," I said. "They were evil, essentially evil—I could feel it when they came near."

"Precisely," Watkins said. "When man in the mass came to earth as spirit, there was some portion of the spirit group that was too essentially evil to blend even with the Piltdown type—it remained, striving after but never accomplishing material shape. That is what we have seen, the dregs left from human forming, evil essences, powerless against us, but able to make us feel their hatefulness by their mere presence."

I was still unconvinced. "How is the grafting done, as you call it—how can such things amalgamate, as you say?" I asked.

"Probably they'll tell us that at Kir-Asa," he answered. "Anyhow, think it over—it's a more reasonable theory of evolution than Darwin's. There's no miss-

ing link, in this chain, between the instinct of the animal and the intellect and reasoning power of man."

He lay down again and left me wondering. Once or twice I thought I saw capering forms away in the shadows, but it is easy to imagine things moving in an uncertain light, and it may have been fancy. Then came dawn, with growing hunger as the problem of the new day.

We sat up, hungry, and looked toward the defile. Of our visitors of the night no sign remained. The curving defile through which the trace of the road led ended our perspective, the natural amphitheatre in which we sat on the boulder was bare and arid as had been all the journey from the chasm. There was nothing for it but to go on, and to take what fate might have in keeping for us beyond the pass in the hills.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN WHO RULED MONKEYS

WE CAME on her just after passing the narrow neck or defile that shut in the valley at its eastern end. She sat on a low rock beside the trace of the ancient road, the first human being we had seen since we passed through the gorge—except for the three head-hunters whom Watkins shot, she was the first since we dragged our boat up out of reach of the tides. One great ape, squatting quietly beside her, peered at us and then went on searching his stomach for lice; another lay beside the boulder, stretched out with its head on its forearm, and too lazy even to look up at us.

It was a sudden encounter, for a point of the hill on the right of our way jutted out, and she sat just beyond the point; for her there could have been nothing unexpected about our coming, since Bent and I were talking about the things we had seen in the night, and there was the noise of our footsteps, too. Probably she had waited here with her monkey guard since the report of the shot-gun warned her of strangers coming down the valley.

She was tall and well-formed, I could see—she stood up as we approached—and clothed in a robe of coarse, dirty-grey linen, held in at the waist by a belt that looked like plaited strips of the same material. I have seen Spanish women with darker skins—there was, in the colour of her bare arms and neck and face, the mark that distinguishes the dark races from the white. The cast of her features was good, even fine, and the black hair, long and tied back at the nape of her neck, was not lank and dead looking as is that of many eastern women, but rather wavy, and glossy-looking, as if it were well-kept. I describe her thus particularly because she was typical of the women we were to see here, as a race, although there were exceptions, of course.

Her age I judged as somewhere round the late thirties or early forties. Her face was finely moulded, but spoilt by a habitually angry expression, though as she rose, staring at Watkins, there was a questioning, puzzled look in her eyes for a few seconds. She spoke in a commanding voice, evidently giving us an order, and stretched out her hand toward the valley, pointing us back the way we had come.

"Madam, I disagree," Watkins said blandly. "We have not done a tight-rope performance in front of a young Niagara to be pushed back by your music-hall turn. We are going on."

She stood pointing, statuesque. The sleepy brute beside its scratching mate sat up and yawned—I think they were orang-outang in breed, but am not certain; they were great, dangerous-looking brutes, I know.

"Rifles loose," Watkins said—he already had his own ready—"and back to back triangle fashion if trouble begins," and he took a step forward. I got my rifle ready, and Bent loaded the shot-gun.

The woman also took a step forward, and almost shrieked a command as she gestured us to return up the valley. Watkins patted his stomach and pointed to his open mouth. "If you'd kindly lead us to a quick lunch-bar, or even a coffee-stall. . . ." he suggested.

Then this strange being facing us—she stood directly in our way now—let loose a torrent of angry language, and as it flowed I saw Watkins' expression change; he listened intently, even frowning with the effort at comprehension. The woman's harangue wound up with a verbal fireworks discharge, a sort of effort at condensing the arguments of a parliamentary debate into ten seconds of throaty assault and battery.

"Gee-whiz!" Watkins said coolly. "And yet some men marry!"

Our position was a deadlock. If we moved another couple of steps, we should have to push this woman out of our way, and to touch her would in all probability result in bringing her monkeys on us.

As she stood silent, expecting us to obey her obvious behest and go back the way we had come, Watkins expressed our intention in his own inimitable way.

"I'd hate to get your monkey up over this, madam," he said, "but we—are—going—on."

She spoke a dozen syllables in reply, slowly and distinctly, and then Watkins amazed me. Carefully, and with obvious effort, he answered her in her own language, or in an equivalent near enough for her to understand. I knew, then, why he had tried so hard to catch words of her former rapid harangue.

The effect was electrical. She sprang back from before us, and called a guttural command. The two great brutes by the boulder looked up, saw her finger pointed at us, and leaped to obey—we had barely time to form our triangle, so quickly did the situation change. One of the beasts, springing at me, got the muzzle of my rifle between his teeth as his paws clutched the barrel, and I pulled the trigger, blowing the back of his skull out. Watkins dropped the other in mid-charge, and we moved forward.

But the woman leaped on her boulder and screamed aloud in a frenzy of rage. Then down the slopes behind her, from unsuspected crannies in the rocks and from concealment behind scrubby bushes, came the main body of her guard, great brutes that tumbled and clawed their way down in answer to her call.

I heard Watkins whistle his dismay before he picked off the foremost of the herd, and saw the woman's face express fear. Evidently the killing at close quarters ranked as a normal business in her mind, but this ability to kill at a distance was a different matter, and she saw doubt as to the outcome of the fight.

But I had little time to observe her. Aiming carefully, I accounted for two of the monkeys at about thirty yards range, and Watkins bagged two more. Bent could do no effective work with the shot-gun, so far, for the brutes were beyond its range; besides, the triangular defence we made gave him the rear to watch, though he was able to keep an eye on what we were doing as well. He could only wait, helplessly, and the strain of waiting accounted for what followed.

We had seven of our assailants dead, and three more were howling and kicking on the ground, disabled. The others hesitated, for there is enough glimpse of reason in these brutes to give them glimmerings of fear, and they connected up the noise of the rifle shots with the deaths of their companions—and they were acting by order of the woman, not because their blood was warmed by close encounter.

But, at their hesitation, the woman danced with rage on the boulder, and shrieked a torrent of commands at them; it was evident that she had them as thoroughly under control as a huntsman with a well-trained pack of hounds, for the foremost dozen or more of the beasts bunched themselves for a charge.

Watkins yelled to the woman to call them off, and she shrieked back that we should die where we stood—he told me the purport of that interchange afterward.

"Aim well, Faulkner," he said to me. "Our lives hang on it."

I HAD recharged my magazine. The woman cried out again to her servants, and they came at us. Then Bent, who could understand the whole business perfectly, but, having no rifle, could no nothing against the monkeys, lost his nerve as the chattering herd of bestiality began its charge. He swung round and, lifting his shotgun, fired at the woman at little more than ten yards' range.

Her commanding cries gave place to a scream of pain and terror; she flung up her arms, and with blood pouring from her mouth—Bent's shot had taken her full in the chest—pitched headlong from the boulder to the ground and died. Her monkeys, hearing her scream, and galled by the fire of the two rifles, pulled up as her voice ceased to urge them and then turned and fled back to the shelter of the hill. I drew a long breath of relief; it was the ugliest form of death I had ever faced.

The monkeys gave no sign of coming to resume the attack. Freed from the urge of their mistress' voice, they feared the roar from the rifles' throats and the leaping fire that struck them from a distance. I had a feeling that the last barrier on our way was passed.

There were four of the brutes, so wounded by our expanding bullets that they could not drag themselves away; to these we put an end with our revolvers, and the herd was eighteen short of its strength at the beginning of the fight. It was short of a mistress, too, and we were unscratched, though, as our original total of ammunition was two hundred rounds per rifle, we could not afford many fights like this.

And Bent—somehow that shot of his changed the way in which I regarded him, while Watkins felt a change too. All the way he had been with us, but not of us, a protesting member, and now he had saved our lives—but by shooting a woman. For some strange reason the gap between him and us had widened.

"First, now," Watkins said, "we must bury the woman—we can't go on and leave the corpse lying here. There's food near-by for us—she must have had something to live on."

We made a grave under the hillside and covered in the body with earth and rocks, and it will simplify matters to state now that we could not have been clear of the place many hours before those infernal monkeys grubbed out the earth and pulled their mistress' corpse to light again. When our self-imposed task was done, Watkins mopped his brow wearily.

"I've had enough in the last three days to last me a year," he announced. "I'm tired, mortally tired of excitements, and want a rest and a bath and a shave and a hair cut and a good square meal. We'll move on and look for them."

In due course we found them all, though not in the order in which he placed them. To begin with, a half-mile or so further on we came to two great rocks that leaned against each other, forming a shelter in the shape of an inverted V. The back of this shelter was roughly thatched with reeds on transverse poles, and the front was closed by a reed and pole door which lifted bodily aside to give entrance—it stood beside the open entry when we saw the place.

Within was a dirty-looking bed on the ground, made up of skins and such coarse linen as the monkey woman had worn; there were sundry other rough fitments, and, what interested us most, a sort of wicker basket containing a dozen eggs—duck eggs, rather small—a big stone jar of water, another jar of maize meal, and a bunch of about twenty ripe plantains.

"Move along and get some wood for a fire," Watkins said to me. "Mine is boiled duck eggs."

I hastened to obey; there was scrubby stuff on the hillside which seemed placed specially for our use, and in ten minutes the eggs were in our cooking pot and on the fire.

We also made a sort of thick porridge with the meal; eggs, in spite of the absence of salt, and porridge vanished like a dream,

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and the plantains followed. We sat, full and content and drowsy.

"That monkey keeping must be a sort of permanent job," Watkins remarked. "Apparently it's a defence of the defile here, for some reason. It's just as well, for our own sakes, that we buried the woman—we might get into trouble with the inhabitants here, supposing we find any, if they found we had killed her in addition to smashing up the monkeys—for which they could hardly blame us."

"What is the language she used?" I asked.

"The nearest I can tell you, so far, is that it's a sort of Persian patois," he answered. "It's a dialect built on a Sanskrit foundation—in my youth I studied Sanskrit, for it's the key to every Aryan language or dialect in the East, and I always meant to come East. I must stuff you two."

"Stuff us?" Bent asked.

"Fill you up with words that will be useful—it's astonishing what you can do in a language if you know three or four hundred words in common use. If you hear it and have to make yourself understood in it, the construction of sentences very soon comes to you. That is, if the language is built on an Aryan foundation, as this is."

He began the stuffing process that day, and I remember that the first lesson consisted of equivalents for such everyday words as "yes," "no," "give," "I have," "have you," "we are," "maize," "eggs," "water," and other commonplaces. But that came later.

We moved on within an hour of our meal. The valley down which we had traveled ended at the top of an escarpment from which we surveyed a great plain, so broad that the hills which ringed it in were blue hazed in the far distance. Far away before us rose the squat cone of the volcano whose smoke-column we had seen from beyond the great chasm, and stretching away from beneath our feet toward the volcano was an ordered, fertile land of which every yard appeared to be under cultivation.

Beside the sheen of rivers or canals thatched huts showed, and here and there, as far as details of the land were distinct enough for us to see, was a grey stone edifice with its thatched huts round it. Away toward the volcano I could see a grey indistinctness rising out the cultivated lands, and toward it Watkins stretched a pointing hand.

"Kir-Asa at last," he said.

We had no field-glasses, so could not verify his conjecture. Nearer, however, was something with which we were more immediately concerned, for at the foot of the escarpment on which we stood was a line of water—evidently an irrigating canal, for it ceased where the trace of the road met it at right angles. A little way beyond the canal the road had apparently been uncovered, for in place of the mere trace on which we stood was a clearly defined, smooth, grey highway which went across the plain toward the distant volcano.

There were figures, either of men or women, working in the cultivated area beyond the irrigating canal, but none within a mile or more of where we stood, and so far we were unobserved, for all that we could see.

We washed in the canal and washed our clothes and shaved.

"In all probability the inhabitants here don't know what a firearm is," Watkins said, as we sat resting afterward, "and as long as we don't shoot we shall have a deadly surprise up our sleeves for use at need. Do you agree?"

"Most emphatically, as long as we can get food without shooting," I said.

Watkins sat gazing across the plain, reluctant to stir himself. Then, suddenly, he slapped his leg.

"Got it!" he exclaimed.

"What?" I asked. "A mosquito?"

"I've been wondering, ever since I read the inscription, why Kir-Asa was written like that. Asa the city under Kir the mountain, and Watkins wrote it that way when he had learned something of the language. It was hyphened in his diary. . . . And now I think we'd better pack up and get along."

BY NOON, we came on a man hoeing in a field of young maize. He was naked down to the waist, whence depended a sort of petticoat that ended at his knees; he wore leg wrapping of coarse grey linen, rolled puttee-fashion, and—sure sign of some degree of civilization—boots, the hair of the hide still on the leather. We came on him quietly, and the noise he made at his work prevented him from hearing us, while the fact that his back was turned our way accounted for his not seeing us, until Watkins spoke to him.

"Ho!" Watkins said.

The worker looked at us in a scared way. He was the male complement of the woman who had ruled monkeys, in racial characteristics, though rather darker skinned,

and without her angry expression. He straightened himself, looked at Bent and at me, and gazed hard at Watkins. Then he dropped on one knee on the ground and bowed his head, evidently with the deepest respect.

"H'm!" Watkins remarked thoughtfully. "Apparently I'm better looking than I thought." Then, to the man, in the equivalent of the language the woman of the monkeys had spoken, "We need food and rest—lead us to them."

Without a moment's hesitation the man shouldered his hoe and came toward us. "Lord, I obey," he said simply, as if it were the most natural thing on earth that strangers should suddenly appear and demand his services.

He led the way to the road; here it fulfilled the promise of the trace we had followed, for it was no longer buried under the accretions of the ages. Fully sixty feet in width it ran, a smooth pavement of squared rock. And we learned later, where a portion of the edge had been broken away, that the blocks of stone so wonderfully fitted to each other were a good eighteen inches in thickness, set in a bituminous kind of cement that made a foundation as hard and enduring as rock itself. Except that an earthquake might shatter it, such a road would endure forever, and in spite of everything I am still inclined to count it the greatest wonder of Kir-Asa.

Along this magnificent highway our guide conducted us for more than a mile; then he turned off to the right, led us up a short avenue bordered by palms and plantains and flowering shrubs, coming at last to the front of a one storeyed building of grey stone, with curtains of woven cane hanging in its unglazed window spaces, and a door of reed thatched on to cane to close the entrance. This door simply lifted aside, bodily, and when in its place its cross-bars fitted into slots in the stone wall. Odd though it may seem, nobody among this race had ever thought of swinging doors on hinges, or else they were not enterprising enough to translate the thought into action.

Three other men, dressed similarly to the one we had followed, were doing nothing by the entrance as we approached, and they made obeisance to Watkins as our guide had done, a thing which puzzled me, since they were not even interested either in Bent or myself. At a sentence from our man, one of these three men ran within the house and presently returned with a superior personage, who wore a tunic above the kilt or petticoat of the labourers, and in addition had a leather belt to which was attached a sheathed knife with a carved wooden handle. His superiority was still further proved by the fact that his clothes were spotlessly clean.

He, too, did deep reverence to Watkins, and evidently waited that person's will.

"We need food and rest," Watkins condescended to explain again, and let the simple statement show that he intended to live up to the position so evidently accorded him. I had not the faintest idea why the mere sight of him set these people bowing and scraping, nor had he.

"Lord, come," the new, clean man invited him. We followed, all three, down a long, dim corridor; our escort lifted a door at the end and leaned it against the wall, motioning us to pass through the doorway.

We entered a spacious, well-lighted room, and, looking upward, I saw the reedy thatch of the building on bamboo rafters. From a skin-covered couch at the far side of the room a man rose at our entrance, and as I saw his face I understood why Watkins had been greeted with so much respect. For in spite of different clothing, greater height, and darker skin, the man who faced him might have been his twin brother, so closely did they resemble each other.

A sentence from the inscription in the cave flashed back into my mind—"this year, being freed, we fledd and returned ...." John Watkins, in the two years he spent here, had made a closer relationship than we had guessed.

For once our Watkins lost his habitual self-possession, as well he might. "And who the devil may you be?" he asked, in good nervous English.

The man facing us was equally startled. "Speak!" he commanded, of course in his own tongue. "Whence came you?"

"From the chasm beyond the hills—from the sea beyond the chasm," Watkins answered him, speaking slowly in the man's own language. Or rather, he spoke in a language so nearly like it as to be understood. There were naturally differences between the equivalent he knew and the language of this people whom he had never seen before.

"Who are you, with my face?" the man asked again.

Watkins smiled. "Who are you, with my face?" he echoed.

The man drew himself up proudly. "I

am Ag, son of Ner, called Ner-Ag," he announced. "Here I rule under the king the lands of the west, with power of life and death. Who are you?"

"Say, Ag son of Ner," Watkins said, choosing his words carefully, "is there not in the records of your fathers a tale of a strange man from the west?"

Ag, son of Ner, permitted himself to smile faintly. "It is no tale, but truth, there was such a one," he answered. "One who came with others from the west, and fled back to the west."

"He was of my house. I am Philip, son of Wat Kins (he separated the name into two words) and blood kin to you, Ag, son of Ner."

If either had doubted the claim, he had but to look at the other's face to find proof.

"And these?" Ag asked, looking first at Bent and then at me.

"This"—Watkins indicated me first—"is Jack, son of Faulk, and this"—gesturing at Bent—"is Cecil, son of Bent. We need food, and rest, man of my blood and breed, having passed many dangers to come to you."

"How came you past the guard of beasts in the pass?" Ag inquired.

"We overcame them by our magic, and so came unharmed, as you see," Watkins answered readily.

"Strong magic," said Ag. He appeared to reflect for a minute, then said, "Come," and himself led us to another large room, halfway along the corridor through which we had been conducted to him. On the way he issued an order to the cleanly robed major-domo who had escorted us before, and who still lingered in the corridor.

In the second room was a table, a solid block of grey rock, recessed for knee room, and furnished with backless, fur-covered settees like that on which Ag had been seated. Presently there appeared servants, naked down to the waist as had been the labourers in the fields, carrying wooden platters of food, a stone jug of water, wooden—or rather sectioned and thinned bamboo—drinking vessels without handles, and knives, but no forks. When I had time to examine one of the knives I found its metal identical with that of the spear I had brought with me.

WATKINS looked at me with a broad smile, and nodded at the dishes on the table. Among them was one in which, very obviously, were two cold roast ducks. There was a crumbly sort of bread or cake made principally from maize flour, and there were some sweet concoctions in which plantain and maize flour cooked together figured—I found later that it was the custom of these people to begin on their sweet dishes, a habit to which I never grew partial.

"Kinsman and guest," said Ag, "eat your fill, you and Jack and Ce Cil"—he stumbled over the name. "And when you have eaten and rested, we will talk of your coming here."

He must have been burning with curiosity about us, as indeed we were about him and his surroundings. Yet he sat by us with scarcely a remark while we ate, and then conducted us to a third room, in which were slightly larger settees, with hard pillows which converted them into beds.

"Rest," said Ag, "and at sunset we will eat together, Philip son of Wat Kins, blood kin to me."

With that he left us. We unslung our rifles, got rid of our packs—we had stuck closely to all our gear, so far, the limit of relaxation consisting in carrying our hats instead of keeping them on our heads—and sat down on the settees, retaining only revolvers and ammunition belts by way of precaution.

"Well?" Bent asked, looking at Watkins.

"A right noble man, this kinsman of mine," Watkins answered, "and one after my own heart. The stars in their courses fight for us, and the luck is too good to last. The roast duck was splendid, but they overlooked the sage and onion stuffing."

With which mixture of grave reflection and his usual quaint comment on the unusual circumstance, he lay down on his settee and composed himself to sleep as peacefully as if he had lived here for years. Strange though it may seem, in five minutes I too was sound asleep. We had passed through so much in the little time since we began the descent of the chasm, and had had so little respite from anxiety and strenuous work, that I was quite content to let the future solve its own problems, and to take the offered rest.

We were awake before sunset, and had just decided that we could safely leave our packs and rifles, if we held on to the revolvers, when Ag entered the room.

We rose, and stood waiting, but with a smile he motioned us to sit again, and himself sat down on one of the settees, beside Watkins. He touched the revolver

holster on the ammunition belt Watkins had put on.

"I would question," he said, "concerning some few things. What is this you wear?"

"It is a strong magic that brings sleep," Watkins answered, unhesitatingly and truthfully; the belt held fifty revolver cartridges.

"What purpose brought you to this land?" Ag asked next.

"A tale that your ancestor told before he died," Watkins answered with equal readiness. "For, Ag my kinsman, there is in some men a hunger that drives them forth from the quiet of a home and the sound of a woman's voice, a restlessness that bids them set foot in perilous places for the quest of things new over which to wonder. So do I know hunger—so do I quest."

Ag looked squarely at him. "Philip, man of my blood, have you come to this land in the desire of power, or in peace?"

"In peace, Ag," Watkins said, returning the steady gaze.

Ag looked away, satisfied. Probably he would have questioned further, but the tinkling of a distant bell interrupted him. He led us to the room in which we had eaten before, and in which, apart from eight servants ranged stiffly round the walls to execute any wish that Ag or his people might express, three persons waited our coming.

There was a woman, darker of skin than any I had yet seen, whom Ag introduced formally to Watkins and through him to us as Niala, his wife; there was a girl—woman, perhaps—of twenty-three, Ag's daughter Eve, and a boy of about fifteen, Ner, his son. In all families of rank, we found, the eldest son took the name of his grandfather, this boy for instance, would be known as Ag-Ner when he came to man's estate, and his son again would be known as Ner-Ag, and commonly called Ag. The custom saved trouble in finding names, I thought. As to the girl's name, I wondered if, like Ag's resemblance to our Watkins it was another legacy left by old John; regarding that we could get no evidence either way, except that we found no other instance of the use of the name.

The boy was dark, and had his mother's cast of face; in the girl, on the other hand, the admixture of white blood showed very plainly.

Eve's wavy, dark brown hair—it was not quite black—was tied in at the nape of her neck, and thence fell halfway to her hips. Both she and her mother wore plainly cut robes of white linen, embroidered above the belt that defined the waist line, and thence falling in graceful folds to the ankle; their dainty shoes were made from thin strips of leather plaited so as to form patterns—I have seen similar work on hunting crop handles. For ornament they wore necklaces of what I took to be little green glass beads, but later we found that these were pierced and threaded emeralds, cut without facets and polished smooth. The art of making glass had been lost among these people, though specimens of glass work, highly prized, still survived in the country.

Ag and his son wore the low-necked tunic, the kilt to the knee, and the leg wrappings and boots usual with males of the country, though in their cases the finest of linen and the softest of leather served as material.

WE ATE, a friendly party, though Bent and I were handicapped by the fact that Watkins had given us only one ration of his "stuffing." I caught a word here and there that I could recognise, and Eve, seated next to me, added to my knowledge of the language by pointing out such common things as knife, salt, or the floor, and getting me to repeat the name. My difficulties over pronunciation made it a merry lesson.

She had, in addition to a grace that was her own, the dignity that made her father a man we already respected and liked, and with these—or perhaps in spite of them—a spirit of mischievous laughter that made her a charming personality. She had great, dark brown eyes, still pools of liquid light—she was beautiful even among this race of women, among whom scarcely one could be called unattractive, and hers was beauty of soul as well as of face and form. Already, with the barrier of language between us to a great extent I felt her charm, and Bent, whom the boy and his mother tried to interest, marked our sudden friendship enviously, I thought.

Suddenly I saw that Watkins was telling Ag of our journey. He balanced a knife on its back between two wooden platters, and rocked it with his finger to illustrate the trembling bridge. Eve, becoming absorbed in the description, as was the boy, included Watkins, myself and Bent in a general glance of admiration. We were all heroes to her from then onward.

But Watkins went on to tell of our journey down the valley, and when he used the phrase—"the place where ghosts chase

women"—Ag put up a hand and stopped him.

"Kinsman Philip," said Ag, "you err in ignorance of the customs of our country. Before our women that place is never mentioned."

I saw that both Eve and her mother looked distressed.

In an awkward silence Ag put some question into which the word "Nantia" came, and in turn Watkins questioned him. It was a hereditary title, we found, held for the time being by the woman in charge of the monkey guard which was set to prevent what they called "poison-dart people" from entering the country. I rejoiced to hear later from Watkins that the use of poisoned missiles had been prohibited among these people long ago, under pain of death, and the trick of making the poison, even, had practically been forgotten. It was used for executions, and for nothing else; as crime and consequent execution were rare, there was little call for the poison, which was made only in Kir-Asa at need.

For the rest, the race was peaceful, mainly agricultural in its pursuits, and gradually decreasing in numbers owing to a very low birth rate. The country had no distinguishing name, since lack of intercourse with any other country rendered one unnecessary; it was about thirty miles by forty in extent, supporting something over two hundred thousand inhabitants. There was a king, but he had become insane about five years before, and authority was vested for the time in a council of five, among whom Ag had most power.

At the king's death the eldest of his three sons, a man now nearly thirty years old, would rule, but by the custom of the country his authority could not be recognised in his father's lifetime—hence the rule of the council. There was but one city, Kir-Asa, of which one of the council of five was governor; Ag and the other three parcelled out the country between them as provincial rulers. These facts Watkins elicited that evening; we learned more later.

We sat long over the fragments of the meal. Eve and I got on famously, in spite of linguistic difficulties. I had a little oval pocket mirror, with silver frame and lid—which hinged backward to form a stand—and with bevelled glass, and toward the end of the evening I took it out to show her her own eyes, while we were trying to converse. She took it from me and examined it reverentially, almost; the hinged cover was a miracle to her, and the glass itself—I had no idea, then, of the value of glass among these people—was to her what a diamond necklace would be to a civilised woman. At last she held it out to me regretfully—I could see she coveted it.

I managed two words, thanks to Watkins' tuition. "I give," I said, making no move to take the mirror.

She looked at me, and blushed before her eyes dropped. Then she shook her head, and with a certain assumption of pride held the mirror out for me to take. But I smiled, repeating, "I give."

Still she refused the gift. I had a brilliant idea.

"Watkins," I said, in a pause in his converse with Ag, "tell this lady that this little present is my way of showing appreciation of her father's hospitality, and I won't take it back."

With a twinkle in his eyes, Watkins translated the desired message. After a pretty little pause of hesitation, Eve signified her pleased acceptance. Then she rose to show the trinket to her father and mother, who stared incredulously at the bevelled glass, and even her brother looked envious of her luck, though why they should make all this fuss over a mere pocket mirror was more than we could tell, then. The intrinsic value of the thing, by their standards, made it a notable gift, and I fancy I went up in Ag's estimation.

Well, it was a trivial incident in itself, but perhaps the way in which I recall it will show the power of Eve's brown eyes.

Only a few minutes later a scared looking servitor—it was the nice, clean man we had met at the entrance to the house—put his head in at the doorway and spoke something to Ag in which I caught the word "Nantia." Ag rose and went out instantly, and in the dead silence which ensued I caught Watkins' warning look at me. I saw his lips set tight in a way that I had come to know, and sensed trouble waiting for us, not far off.

I SAW Eve glance from one to other of us three nervously, almost fearfully, as Ag went out and constraint fell on us who remained. So easily and naturally had we fitted into the ways of this friendly household—except for the mention of ghosts—that we had practically forgotten the strangeness and possible dangers of our position when this reminder was suddenly thrust on us. I saw Watkins unobtrusively loosening his revolver in its holster, and followed his example. Then we waited.

The Woman Who Ruled Monkeys.

At last Ag came back. He spoke a word of command and the eight servants who still stood by the walls went out. When he judged them quite out of hearing, Ag spoke.

"Philip, son of Wat Kins," he said gravely, "one of my people who went to the pass to take food to the Nantia has returned, bringing word that she and certain of the beasts lie dead."

"It was the price of resisting our advance through the pass," Watkins said coolly, resting a hand as if by accident on his revolver butt, and looking frankly up at his interlocutor.

"Peace!" Ag bade. "Make no confession that might force me to judge. I have already decided that I will not judge, else had I not spoken, and accused, before my wife and children. For in my hands, should I judge, is power of life and death."

"Not over us," Watkins contradicted quietly. "The magic by which we passed the beasts is more potent than any force used against us."

At the boldness of that speech Ag frowned, for never before had his power been called in question. But he put the personal feeling aside—a great man, was Ag.

"Philip, my kinsman," he said, "between us is the bond of race, and you with Jack son of Faulk and Ce Cil son of Bent have eaten with me and in my house—I will not judge. Yet not even I, Ner-Ag"—he used his full title to mark the gravity of his speech—"can prevent your trial and perhaps your sentence."

"And that is . . . ?" Watkins asked.

"One of you killed the Nantia—for that one, death," Ag answered solemnly. "For the others, deprivation of all rights, since they were accessory."

Watkins, not yet familiar with the intricacies of the language, puzzled this out to his own satisfaction. We two waited, uncomprehending, but understanding that danger had recurred for us in some form.

"As to rights, since we have none we can be deprived of none," Watkins said at last. "And we were driven to fight—it was kill or be killed."

Ag shook his head. "The Nantia is sacred—on her the safety of the pass depends, and failing her presence the poison-dart people would come in and destroy us. Who attempts to injure her, dies—it is the law, stronger even than my power. And for the safety of the Nantia, I, Ag, ruler of these western lands, am personally responsible."

"What will you do?" Watkins asked, when he had got the sense of this declaration, from which he saw that safety of the woman was indeed a matter of vital importance to these people.

"Take you three to Kir-Asa for trial befor the council of five," Ag said.

"Then we are prisoners here?" Watkins questioned, his hand again straying toward the revolver butt. Ag saw the movement, and interpreted in the light of Watkins' definition of the revolver.

"Nay," he said hastily, "use no magic, no charms. The fate of the Nantia and her beasts is proof of your power."

"We are prisoners here?" Watkins reiterated.

"So I must hold you," Ag confessed, "yet, given your promise to offer no resistance, still guests also. Kinsman Philip—" and even I could feel the emotion in his appeal—"your coming in this fashion has moved me to lay my house open to you, to give you place as kin and friend. If by your magic you attempt escape, even though it be by the way you came, my own life is forfeit to the council. For it is known to my household, and beyond, that you three have come through the pass to me, and that the Nantia and many of her beasts have suffered death in a way strange to our people—death that breaks and mangles bone and flesh beyond the power of spear thrusts. As you are in my hands, so am I in your hands, yet I will trust you in freedom among my people until the time of trial, if you will."

Watkins considered. "Nobly spoken, Ag," he said at last. "What would you have us do?"

"I myself cannot pass sentence on my guest," Ag said, and by that Watkins knew that the age-old bond of hospitality which runs among unspoiled people from Tangier to Singapore was sacred in the eyes of these people too. "Thus I would take you to Kir-Asa, and there, chief among your judges, render your sentence light as may be. That is, for the two who are accessory—for the slayer there is no hope."

"None are accessory," Watkins replied. "We three came as one—as one we bear and suffer for each other, fight for each other, and at need die for each other."

I saw Eve watching him with growing approval and admiration. Ag signified his approval more definitely.

"Hear, my son, how the men of our race should always speak," he said. "This is a man."

"Ag," said Watkins—he took the decision

on himself, without consulting us who could not understand what was passing—"we will come with you to Kir-Asa. Our magic and your power may yet win us pardon."

But Ag shook his head doubtfully. "There could be no greater crime in the eyes of the people than this of killing the Nantia," he said, "though I realise it as an act to which you were driven by utter peril of life. Kinsman Philip, I take your word, for yourself and Jack and Ce Cil. Rest as my guests, regarded innocent until judgment be made, and free of all that is mine until we set out for Kir-Asa."

WITH that for a final word he broke up our gathering. I knew little of the gravity of the discussion—or rather, I put it aside from my mind until Watkins should explain its purport—and lingered over parting with Eve, though I wondered at her expression of grave concern. As soon as we three were alone in our sleeping apartment, Watkins outlined the conversation to us two as nearly as he could. We had small lamps, fed with an oil which, though thicker than paraffin, smelt decidedly like that fuel, and by the light of these we sat to discuss the situation.

"It's a pretty little mess," Watkins concluded, "but we've faced worse. In any case, we must go on to Kir-Asa—Ag has played the man with us, and it's up to us to play the man with him."

But I think our sleep was none the worse for knowing that trial, with possibly sentence of death as a verdict, waited us in the near future.

Be that as it may, Watkins' sly allusions to Eve got home on me more than his statement of our coming trial. I was with him fully when he told how he had declined to hold one of us more responsible than the others for the death of the monkey woman, and as a matter of course with him in the decision to go to Kir-Asa with Ag—there could be no other decision.

"Of course, Faulkner," he commented, "you'll be glad to get back here when the trouble has blown over, and there'll be a welcome for you, too. Never saw quite such rapid progress."

He dodged the boot I threw at him.

In the morning he wakened me by whistling snatches of "Salut d'Amour" and the "Bridal Chorus" in my ear, continuing until I got up and chased him round the room, belabouring him with my hard pillow.

"I can understand your good spirits, Faulkner," he said, "but on the whole I think that for men awaiting sentence of death Bent and I are remarkably cheerful."

I was moved to serious questioning for a minute. "Then you don't really attach much importance to the possibilities of the trial?" I asked.

He shook his head doubtfully. "Ag is a good man, and we are good men," he said. "What is against us we have yet to find out. For the rest, to-day it good—"

It was good, Khayyamish philosophy, rather damped by Ag's gravity when he came to conduct us to breakfast. Eve and the boy Ner were there to eat with us, but Niala, Ag's wife, did not appear. We began the meal as a sober party, taking our note from our host, but Watkins, who knew a few conjuring tricks, produced a knife from the back of his neck, took a sweet potato from Bent's ear, and with these and two or three more bits of elementary magic—of which he was careful to explain the secrets—won a smile or two from Eve and laughter from the boy.

We learned that Ag had his town residence in Kir-Asa, where, as head of the governing council, he spent about half his

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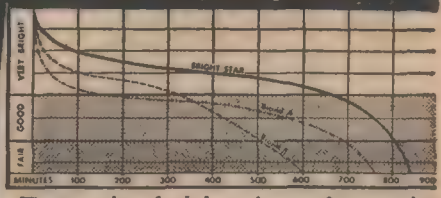

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time. He proposed to set out with us, taking his family as was his custom, the next morning, devoting two days to the journey. Having explained this to Watkins, he handed us over to the boy Ner, who would show us anything we wished to see in connection with the estate.

I had made such progress in the language already that when Watkins told me of this, I was able to invite Eve to accompany us. The invitation consisted of the one word "Come?" put questioningly. She accepted. Though Ner guided us painstakingly and courteously, I learned little from our inspection, but improved my vocabulary.

The way of such intimacies as mine with Eve is easy to follow, easy to foretell. Whether, at that time, her brown eyes lighted all the world for me, or whether the full realisation of unquestioning surrender to the spell of love came later, I cannot tell. Looking back from this point to that day, I know that already this queenly girl was stirring me to folly—for, alien in speech and far separated in training, habits, conceptions of life, as we were, it was folly from a practical standpoint—and already I was past resistance, content in the present and careless for the future, glad that of us three she devoted her attention most to me.

I did not know, then, that on her side there was an ulterior motive for encouraging me. Later I learned that when Watkins told her of our exploits on the way, and caused her to regard us as heroes capable of slaying any dragons, she turned to the one whom instinctive liking bade her choose, and regarded me as an instrument with which to dispose of her particular dragon. More of that in its place.

Her motive, her initial reason for accepting my advances so readily, was innocent enough, and when I came to know the whole matter it made no difference in my regard for her. At that time, not knowing, I was very well pleased that she should constitute herself my instructress in the language of the country, and generally attach herself more to me than to Bent or Watkins.

That night Watkins forbore to chaff. He sat on his bed with a boot in his hand, and regarded me.

"This looks serious, Faulkner," he said. "I'd be first to admit that she's a charming girl, but you're making a pace that will land you in John Watkins' position very soon, if you're not careful."

"Possibly," I said. "I could imagine a worse fate."

He whistled. "Race, training, habits, place," he said. "Jack Faulkner, you're twenty-nine, old enough to be a little wiser. One wakes from dreams, remember."

"Does it matter, if the dreams comes true?" I asked.

He sat and mused, absently.

"If it's the big thing," he said at last, "may the gods be good to both of you, and it's no man's work to interfere. If I hadn't let the big thing go when I might have held it, I shouldn't be wandering all over the East for things to help me to forget—I shouldn't be here. I let it go, and that's my own little tragedy—you've got to decide for yourself whether to let go or hold. Only—I like these people, and they come a little nearer to me than pure-blooded foreigners, as you know. Don't play, Faulkner."

Whatever may have been my realisation of Eve before, I know that his request then forced me to face the situation. "It's not play, Watkins," I told him.

He put his boot down on the floor carefully, came over to me, and put a hand on my shoulder. "If I can help, old chap, let me know," he said.

Somehow the simple request brought us immeasurably nearer to each other. I think it was his breadth of outlook, his lack of prejudice such as a smaller man might have displayed in a like case, and his implicit reliance on my sense of honour, that strengthened the bond between us. I felt, to put it mildly, grateful to him; he might have ridiculed, or condemned; instead, he understood.

In this was one of the examples of how Bent was apart from us two. He lay on his bed, listening, but making no attempt at comment or participation in something—not an unimportant thing in its possible bearing on our future—which Watkins and I shared. His separateness then was characteristic of our intercourse after the shooting in the pass, and, judging Watkins and myself as impartially as possible, I cannot see it as all our fault. Of his own volition he held away from us; he did not take the matter of the coming trial as lightly as did we, and I think the fact that he was responsible weighed on him.

WE HAD had no hint of the nature of our journey to Kir-Asa, and next morning we found it something of a state affair. There were wooden wheeled,

springless rickshaws with cane bodies to convey us along the great road, with two men to pull each one of us, and in addition to this staff Ag took to the city some two score of his multitudinous servants.

We set out early, an imposing procession headed by the white-attired major-domo, and made a long halt in the middle of the day to avoid its greatest heat; our way lay through an area of unvarying fertility, well watered, and apparently cultivated with great care. Our noon halt was made under a big, reed-roofed, open shelter beside the road, and here a cloth was spread on the ground and food set out by the retinue Ag had brought. Nightfall brought us to a little group of reed huts, which we learned through Watkins were specially constructed—as was the midday shelter—for Ag's journeys between his country estate and city residence.

That evening I found I had made great progress in the language. I could understand some of the talk between Watkins and Ag, and as we all ate together again Eve gave me further tuition. When we three got to the hut apportioned to us, Watkins showed his appreciation of my knowledge.

"What's the word for 'understanding,' Watkins?" I asked him.

"You're not in my class," he answered, "and I'll stuff you no more. Ask your own instructor to-morrow."

And, though I pressed the query, he was obdurate.

"I'm going to sleep," he announced finally. "My pronunciation isn't perfect, anyhow, and the word's a tough one in their language. You go to sleep too, Adam. She'll fix that word for you to-morrow, and as many more as you care to ask."

I was just dozing off when his voice came to waken me.

"In your shoes, I wouldn't care if I didn't know their old language," he said. "It's a fine, healthy sort of excuse."

In the silence that followed I had nearly gone off to sleep, when:

"What about retaliating with lessons in English? They might be useful, later on."

The darkness of the hut, the hint of amusement in his voice, and my own realisation of all the suggestion implied, come back to me as I write.

In the morning we set out again along the great paved road, passing on toward the smoke column that went up from the volcano directly ahead of us, behind Kir-Asa itself—the smoke was less in volume, I thought, than when we had seen it from a greater distance. The crater and bare, upper slopes were clearly visible at about twenty miles' distance from where we set out that morning; we were still passing through a district of well-tended, irrigated fields of maize, areas of plantain growth, and enclosures of grass land on which small, dun-coloured, humped cattle grazed.

These cattle and multitudes of pigs comprised the domestic animals of the country—both sheep and horses were unknown, and I saw no goats; the pigs were generally dirty white, though there was a black breed as well, and intermediates; they were all long-legged, scrawny brutes, but the pork left nothing to be desired.

At near on noon the way began to ascend, and soon the ground on either side grew arid and rocky, except where water had been led down from some still higher ground beyond to make vegetation possible. There were some ugly cactus growths in this belt, and Ag told us that their fibres were used for the making of fine linen. Ahead of us now a great rock wall showed, cutting directly across our line of travel; it was about twenty or twenty-five feet in height, with the top overhanging toward us, and, when we could see both sides, we found that the thickness of the top of the wall was about a third greater than that of its base, so that it overhung on both sides.

On the side nearer to us a trench or moat, about twenty feet in depth and width, went down from the base of the wall. Moat and wall formed the defences of Kir-Asa, and to any attack without artillery the place was utterly impregnable. From the bottom of the moat to the top of the wall the distance was at no point less than forty feet, and this great fortification had not been built; it had been hewn from the solid rock, as had the whole city.

The founders of this place had chosen a site where the quality of the rock over a large area admitted of enduring results from their work, and here they had quarried them a city which, I estimated later, could house half a million people in comfort within its protecting wall.

The diameter of the city, which was roughly circular in plan, was somewhere between two and three miles. Toward the point where the road passed through the wall our servants pulled us up a fairly steep ascent, and we saw that there were two square apertures in the wall itself to give entrance to the city. These were closed at need by circles of rock fitted in grooves, like gigantic pennies stood on edge, and

capable of being rolled back into hollows in the wall to give access to the city.

A simple mechanism of levers, actuated from the inside, controlled those unique gates. The squared holes in the wall into which they fitted to close the way into the city were about twenty feet in height. As we passed through the right hand aperture I saw the edge of the great stone towering high in its recess on my right hand, while the slot into which it fitted below ground, so as completely to close the square hole when required, was spanned by stout wooden planks over which our conveyances were pulled.

Before us a wide avenue led straight across half the city to its centre; on either side of it the quarried edifices rose to flat tops that were level with the top of the wall, for the most part, though some were a few feet higher. It must be understood that there was no building, practically, as we understand the word, in Kir-Asa; the whole city was quarried out of the solid rock.

Yet it was not gloomy or unpleasing. There were open spaces to which soil had been brought of sufficient depth to support palms and graceful flowering shrubs, as well as the lighter growth which the climate and nature of the soil forced to a gorgeous profusion. For lack of care many of these beds had withered and died, for the people who now inhabited the city were like a spider living in a tortoise-shell —they filled barely a fortieth part of the whole; the rest was unused, neglected, almost unvisited.

Ag pointed up the avenue to a great mansion that stood in the centre of the city. "The house of the king," he said, and Watkins translated for our benefit. So far as I was concerned, he need not have taken the trouble—but I did not tell him so.

There were many people in this main street; women, clad similarly to Eve and her mother, but in varying degrees of fineness, stopped to watch us pass; men looked, and then paused at the unfamiliar attire and pale faces of Ag's three guests. And there were children, inquisitive as children are in every country, who ran beside our rickshaws, got in the way of Ag's attendants, or peered out at us from the pillared porticoes with which many of the buildings (for so I must call them, for want of a better word) were fronted.

We turned in at a great mansion that stood halfway between the city gateway and the king's house, descending from our conveyances at the entrance, and passing to a spacious hall which rose to the full height of the mansion, and boasted two rows of square columns as intermediate supports for the rock roof. Apartments opened out on either side, and at the far end from the entrance a splendid stairway of quartz led to galleries which gave access to the rooms of the two upper stories. This central hall and division of the space on either side into three floors was typical of the majority of the mansions of Kir-Asa, and later we found it reproduced on a greater and far more magnificent scale in the house of the king.

"My guests," said Ag, "I bid you welcome to my house."

So we came to Kir-Asa.

CHAPTER IV

THE CITY OF WONDERS

A MESSENGER had preceded Ag to the city, so that when we entered the mansion all was prepared for us. We three were conducted to the first gallery of the mansion, and found that a suite of four communicating rooms had been apportioned to us for use. Here we removed all traces of our journey, and an obsequious servitor, waiting in the gallery, preceded us back to the great central hall, where on a dining table of solid stone, like that at which Ag had first given us food, but bigger, we joined him and his family and one other for the midday meal.

"My kinsman and his friends," Ag introduced us, adding our names. To us he named the newcomer as "Ahan-Neray," which immediately told us not only that the man was Neray son of Ahan, but also that he was eldest or only son of his father, since only in the case of the eldest son was this compound form of name used. Had he been a second son—though few families boasted more than one—he would have been introduced as "Neray of the house of Ahan," but the two names would not have been spoken in conjunction with each other.

"That man," Watkins remarked to me, "has got to name his son Ahan, whether he likes it or no. Pretty hard on him."

The man Neray was about my own height—that is, just six feet—and something of a dandy in his way. He wore a braided leather belt, while Ag and Ner were content with plain leather, and his belt clasp of yellow metal was set with such bits of green crystal—emerald—as Niala

and Eve wore for necklaces. We did not yet know these stones for emeralds, but I guessed the clasp to be gold, and I was right.

He was even darker of skin than Niala; had his hair not been cut quite so closely, and had his nose been a bit longer, one might have put him in voluminous white garments and taken him for a Pathan horse-dealer—he inclined rather to that type, and it is a kingly breed of men in appearance. When we sat down to our meal I sat on the left of Ag, who took the centre seat on one side of the stone table; Eve sat on my left, and Neray, with a somewhat hostile stare at me as if I had usurped his place, made a conspicuous promenade of going to sit by Niala. It was easy to see the state of affairs as far as he was concerned; as for Eve, it seemed to me that she had an extra welcoming smile for me.

"My kinsmen are strangers," Ag told Neray. "They come from a far land, through the great cleft beyond our western border."

Neray considered it. "The Nantia gave you safe passage?" he asked me.

"The Nantia is dead," Watkins answered for me.

Neray stared. "But the new Nantia . . . ?" he asked, and hesitated.

"Is already on her way to her task," Ag replied. "That is my concern, Neray." Then he put all the cards on the table with regard to us. "These my guests have come to Kir-Asa to stand before the council of five and answer for the Nantia's death."

He spoke slowly, and I got the whole of the sentence with little difficulty. I saw Eve's hand steal along the settee toward me as if she would assure me of her sympathy; she did not check the involuntary movement in time to prevent Neray's seeing it.

Ag's statement was like the dropping of a bomb. Neray's jaw dropped, and he stared aghast at me, opposite him. Here was a thing incredible to him.

"Slayers of the Nantia—free in my city?" he gasped.

"Not so, Neray," Ag said composedly, "but my kinsman and his friends, not yet judged, and therefore by law not to be held guilty of the slaying, for aught we know. Freely and of their own will came they with me to Kir-Asa, and if you are governor of the city, yet am I head of the council."

From that I knew not only that Neray was governor of the city, but also that as member of the council of five he would be one of our judges. His evident jealousy over Eve's partiality for me might prove a factor in his judgment of the case, I felt. As Ag's guest, he made no further protest against the leniency with which we were treated.

"When will the trial be held?" he asked.

"I am summoning the council to meet on the fourth day from this in mid-morning," Ag answered. "Word has gone out to the remaining three lords, and there are some small matters of state that need adjustment. This trial will follow on our decisions of state concerns."

Watkins, eyeing the clasp on Neray's belt, changed the subject. "Tell me, Ag," he asked, "where do you smelt that metal?"

But Ag could not understand the question. Watkins explained to him that all metals are diffused in rocks, and smelted out by heat or some refining process. Neray grinned his incredulity, and even Ag looked doubtful over the news, as it was to him.

"Whence do you obtain your metals, then?" Watkins asked.

"From the storehouses of Kir-Asa," Neray answered, with a rather pitying smile, as if it were an obvious matter.

"Yet for your spears, your spades, your knives, and all the metal articles you use, such stores must soon be exhausted," Watkins commented.

Ag smiled. "If ten times our number drew on the stores for twenty times the life of a man, they would not use half the blocks of metal here," he said. "As for that yellow clasp, though it will not rust it is a soft metal, of little use save for the making of ornaments, and the stores of it are but meagre—they would scarce fill this hall. But of the white metal—the blocks are eaten with rust in some chambers, it is true, yet there is all that the people need for generations to come."

I had a vision of gold ingots, enough to "scarce fill half this hall," lying unvalued in this city of a trebly guarded land. I imagined them passing the barrier of the great gulf to upset the metal markets of the world—gold by the thousand tons! Meanwhile it was apparent that this race had never smelted a single ton of ore; its people drew on stores left by some extinct predecessors and sufficient for all their simple needs.

"Have you no mines?" Watkins asked.

"What are mines?" Neray asked.

WATKINS explained, as well as he was able. Both Ag and Neray pleaded their country's innocence of such—the idea of metal having to be won from rock seemed incomprehensible to them, though Ag confessed that up toward the volcano there was a hole in the ground whence they won oil, such as was used in their lamps—it was thicker than the lamp fuel, and they had a crude process of distillation to refine it.

"Do you not use stone for building?" Watkins asked, trying to find if there were any quarrying, such as would have given a hint of the existence of metal in rock strata.

"Why should we build, save for reed huts that the people erect as they need?" Ag asked him in return. "Are there not enough of houses in the land?"

"Good Lord!" Watkins muttered in English. "Here's a race that has taken over a country ready-made—no mines and no buildings—no nice little flutters on a toy stock exchange, and not a solitary bricklayer to form a trade union and demand a minimum wage. Do you get it, Faulkner?"

"I'd like to see the gold reserve," I answered.

"I cannot understand," Neray remarked, inviting translation.

"I told my friend what you have told me," Watkins said to him.

"It takes many words in your tongue to express few in ours," Neray remarked suspiciously.

"That gentleman is asking for a thick ear," Watkins said to me. Then: "You have money—tokens for the barter of goods?" he asked Ag.

"For little things—yes," Ag answered, and took from a pocket in his tunic a disc of white metal, on which was stamped, or rather sunk, the device of an axe on one side. The reverse of the coin was plain.

"These are for small things," he said, "and we set their value against a measure of maize. But for larger transactions they are too heavy, and a man will give pigs for an ox, eggs for maize, meat for clothing, or for boots. It is easier."

"And if a man would buy land?" Watkins asked.

"Buy land?" Ag echoed, as if Watkins spoke of carrying water in a sieve. "The land is the property of us four lords of the provinces and of our children, save for that portion which belongs to the king."

"But the people who till the land—what hold have they?"

Ag found his ignorance of a system which, to himself, was as immutable as the laws of life and death, amusing. "Each man holds land from his lord," he said, "and renders part of its fruits to his lord for the use of the land. Thus are all fed, and all content—there is enough for all."

The ideal, patriarchal simplicity of such a system! "No water rate, no income tax," Watkins remarked to me.

"And this race of yours—for how many generations has it held the land?" he asked next.

"Generations beyond numbering," Ag answered. "Ages since, it was a great and powerful race, spreading beyond these borders, but for generations the race has dwindled—the children are few. Before this was a race of another sort, and before that again a people of which little is known save that they cut this city out of the rock, and that their king lived in another, greater city far away in the West. They have left writings of which some two or three were translated and also written in a language of our first fathers here, which none can read now."

So this, the third race in succession to possess so desirable a heritage, was dying out. I found later that Ag and his son and daughter were on the whole more vigorous, mentally stronger, and altogether a better type than the pure breed, in which, taking them in the mass, was a lack of initiative, disinclination to enterprise. This was typified in the fact that with no great show of force four "lords" could parcel out the country between them and hold its population as serfs, albeit comfortable serfs. We met individuals active and enterprising enough in their way, in the ruling class among which fate and Ag's help had fixed our lot, but it appeared that the race as a whole had inherited too much, lost the constructive genius that comes of being forced to self-dependence.

Watkins questioned further, and found that the decrease in population had long been a cause for concern. It had even led to modification of the laws affecting marriage.

"If two of our people marry and have no children by the end of the fourth year," Ag told him, "then they may go their ways unquestioned to marry others, but in such case the man is forced to marry again, lest he should leave his wife without just cause."

"Why only the man—why is not the woman compelled also?" Watkins asked.

"There is no need," Ag told him, evidently amused at the idea. "For every four

girl children that are born there are five men children, and the woman in such a case would have no peace."

"Solution of the problem of the surplus woman—export her here," Watkins remarked to me. These asides of his were texts with which I could freshen his memory afterwards, so that he could amplify what I had understood of the conversation.

We learned much of the ways of the country at that meal, for which it seemed that Neray had dropped in in a casual way, calling on his fellow member of the council. His real reason for coming was apparent when he took his leave, for he bent over Eve's hand and spoke softly to her a little apart from the rest of us, and I saw her shake her head at his words. His manner toward me was plainly disdainful, and Eve looked from him to me as if comparing us....

LATE in the afternoon Ag visited us in our rooms, and in answer to his question Watkins assured him that we had everything we could wish, and were more than comfortable. Then Ag, evidently with a weight on his mind, sat down to consult us—or rather to confer with Watkins.

"I would seek your advice, kinsman Philip," he began, a little nervously for him, "and your aid as well, if among your magic there is a charm that will serve."

"All in our power is at your service," Watkins assured him.

"Neray took my daughter apart to tell her the king is dying," Ag said. "This he has told her at any time these past three years, but some day it may be true."

"Probably it will," Watkins agreed, "But why should the king not die, if he likes?"

"The king has three sons, Comin-Saya, his heir, Manos, and Macer the youngest," Ag proceeded. "While the king lives, these three have not so much power as I hold as head of the council. At the king's death Comin-Saya has power of life and death over me and my house, as would the king hold now if he were sane."

Watkins considered this. "You mean the minute the king dies the new king can do as he likes with you?" he suggested.

"It is so," Ag answered—he had no more thought of questioning that absolute power than of doubting the existence of the sun. For these people laws were inexorable.

"Meanwhile the heir to the throne, as such, has no power at all," Watkins continued.

"That is the law," Ag said.

"Well—on what subject do you seek our advice or aid?"

"Comin-Saya, son of Saya-Comin the king, has asked me thrice for my daughter Eve in marriage," Ag explained.

Still Watkins was puzzled, and I understood enough to be worse than puzzled. I saw this business more clearly than did Watkins, having a deeper interest in it.

"Why refuse such an honour?" Watkins asked. "Surely—the king's wife...."

"The king who still lives is mad," Ag interrupted, "and Comin-Saya his father also went mad before him and strangled his wife as she slept beside him, for in madness love becomes hate. It may be that this Comin-Saya, the heir, will in turn go mad, and thus I will not give him the daughter I love."

Watkins thought it over. "If she were already married?" he asked.

"There would then be no need for your charms," Ag said. "I would not drive her to marriage against her will—this Neray, governor of the city, has urged her these five years past, and only to-day he reminded her that the king's death would place her in Comin-Saya's power."

"Is she inclined toward Comin-Saya, think you?" Watkins inquired.

Ag shook his head. "She is of my mind," he answered, "and would sooner die than go to Comin-Saya."

"And Neray—what is her mind about him?" Watkins pursued.

"The mind of a maid—wavering as a leaf in a wind," Ag said. "For years she has held him off, though of all who have sought her he has won most smiles."

Watkins thought it over. "Jack—Cecil," he said at last. "Listen while I state the case," and he gave us the facts as Ag had put them before him, while Ag for his part looked at us hopefully. We listened, and at the end of the recital Bent shook his head.

"Insoluble," was his comment.

I had a thought of asking Ag to let me try my luck against Neray, but would not risk it.

Like Bent, I had to shake my head, and again Watkins mused.

"I have it," he announced finally.

"What?" I asked.

He disregarded the query. "Ag," he asked, "of all the lords of this land, and of all people who hold any power, how many incline to you and how many against you?"

Ag balanced one hand against the other

as if to say that the count was equal. "Of people who have power there are few in the land," he said, "but full half would do my bidding."

"And who, next to the king, holds most power in the land?" Watkins asked next.

The import of the question dawned on Ag slowly. When he understood, he stood up, staring at Watkins as if unable to believe his ears.

"Yet are you slave to a custom," said Watkins the iconoclast. "A man of strength and no small wisdom, you submit without question to a family that breeds madmen generation by generation, giving them power of life and death over yourself and your children. I tell you there is one way, and only one way, for the saving of Eve your daughter from this fate you fear."

"No," said Ag, as if he would thrust the mere idea out of his mind. "Say no more, kinsman Philip."

"Choose for yourself," Watkins said. "Sacrifice your daughter whom you love, the noblest lady this land has shown us, to Comin-Saya—or take his place."

Ag turned and fled from us, and as he went out Watkins smiled.

I had not understood all of this; when it was explained to me I had not overmuch liking for it. Revolutions had not been part of my training, I pointed out.

"You miss my brilliant idea, my ulterior motive," said Watkins the crafty. "If Ag were king, there'd be an end of the trouble about that infernal monkey woman—we could count on going to the football match on Saturday afternoon without the bother of carrying our heads under our arms. King Ag, with power of life and death—the solution of his troubles and our own as well."

"The trial takes place in three days' time," I reminded him. "Ag is not likely to revolute in so short a time as that."

"I've given him the pill, and he's swallowed it," Watkins retorted. "If only the mad king is really on his last legs, that pill will work—Ag will hop around and get things done. All we can do is to pray for a break in the weather, so that the king's rheumatism gets really painful."

There was not much hope, I felt, as far as evading trial was concerned, and, from the attitude of that fop Neray, for whom I had little liking, there would be one of the five judges dead against us. Meanwhile, I had three days in which to get on with learning the language, just in case I might have a use for it after the trial.

That evening, when we met round the table for food, there were no outsiders present. Ag looked thoughtful, but made no direct reference to Watkins' daring suggestion. He listened courteously but abstractedly while Watkins told him impossible fairy tales of carriages that ran without men to pull them, and of men talking to each other at a distance equal to the whole stretch of this country. He was tremendously interested, though, when with the aid of the hinged cover to the mirror I had given Eve—and which she carried with her that evening—Watkins explained the principle of hanging doors on hinges instead of lifting them bodily about. In fact, he announced his intention of calling in a craftsman in metal working, explaining the marvel to him, and getting a specimen set of hinges made.

BEFORE we had risen next morning, Ag's chief servitor came to us bearing suits of the clothing of these people, by his master's order.

"If you choose to go about the city, lords," he said, "my lord bids you accept these poor gifts, that you may escape remark through strangeness of your attire."

We bade him thank his master for this characteristic thought for our comfort, and put the things on. They were of the finest linen, and better suited to this warm climate than our own shabby clothes, though for my part, when I had put on the puttee leg wrappings and got into the kilt, I missed my breeches pockets and felt as if I had been put into an old-fashioned nightshirt far too short for me.

"Lord save us!" Watkins ejaculated, when we had all three dressed. "If there's a high wind to-day, I'm staying in."

We all felt a bit nervous at first, but, so far as wind was concerned, the unvarying breeze from the west swept gently enough through the city, and in regard to that I think the volcanic area, causing an up-draught through its warmth, sucked in air toward itself to produce this breeze throughout the small extent of the country in the dry season, in which, except for occasional storms, calm weather was the rule. In the rainy season, due to begin about three months hence, I gathered that storms of almost more than tropical violence made life in the huts of the peasantry a misery.

We saw nothing of Ag till the evening of that day, nor, in fact, was he with us in the daytime for any of the three days before the assembly of the council. From this Watkins augured good results.

"My pill is working," he said. "Ag is rigging the market, and shares in royalty aren't worth buying."

As to that, we had to wait on events. Meanwhile Niala, solicitous as her husband for our well-being—she was a sort of neutral echo of Ag—suggested that both the boy Ner and Eve would show us anything we cared to see of the city. To me it seemed a little strange that a girl like Eve should be permitted such freedom with strangers, but here, since for the sake of the race they were of such immense importance, women had equal freedom with men in every way, in addition to the privileges their sex conferred.

Although theft was not unknown, in a country where, as Ag put it, there was enough for all, half the dangers of what we are pleased to call civilized life were absent.

The ways of these people were more those of the Inca kingdom of Peru than any other I can recall.

In those three days we saw much. We began by going up to the centre of the city, where in the middle of a great circular space stood the hewn palace of the kings of Kir-Asa. In front of the palace itself was a gigantic monolith, square in section and perfectly plain. Its face was about eight feet in width, as one looked toward the palace, and with its lower edge about on a level with my eyes a tablet of gold, some five feet square, was blended into the rock.

At the top of the tablet there was an axe engraved as a sort of heraldic device, and under this were characters not unlike Chinese writing, occupying about three-quarters of the tablet. Under this inscription, as it proved to be, was a translation into the written characters of this people's language—it was another Rosetta stone, a key to the language of the world's first civilisation.

Here Eve and the boy led us first, and we gazed at the monolith, towering above us to the height of the city wall.

"This," said Ner, "is the work of him who hewed the city."

Watkins looked up at the inscription. "Can you read it for us?" he asked.

"Assuredly," Ner said, "since that small writing at the foot of the tablet is in our own language."

He read it out. Later, I got Eve to read it to me again, slowly, and wrote it down. If only as proof of the vanity of human pride, and the impermanence of fame, it is worth recording:

"A decree of Kirtas-Asen, viceroy of the isles and lands of the East, holder of the second sceptre, warden of the eastern gate, lord of slaves unnumbered, terrible in war, and in my rule just to all the people.*

"In this tenth year of my viceroyalty was hewed the last chamber of this city of my pride, and was laid the last stone of the road that runs twenty days' journey to the sea. I have filled all the storehouses of this my city with gold and corn and the metals of war and of peace, and have made provision of water, so that if the whole earth shall fail of her fruits there shall be no lack nor any need that shall not be met in this city of my pride.

"Now I in my pride decree:

"As Kir the mountain of fire that is set over this city bears witness to the glory of my father Kirtas who was viceroy of the isles and warden of the eastern gate before me, so shall the name of this city in token of my glory be called Kir-Asa while the generations of men endure. So throughout all the world forever shall the sons of men bow down at the speaking of my name, because of my glory and my pride.

"At the rising of the sun, O ye peoples of the isles and lands of the East, bow yourselves in honour of the mighty king who sits enthroned in glory in the mother of hewn cities, even An, where is gathered all power that goes forth to rule the world. At the going down of the sun, O peoples, bow yourselves in reverence to me, Kirtas-Asen, who have caused ten thousand slaves to labour that this city and the road my father Kirtas planned might be perfected in this tenth year of my viceroyalty.

"Thus I in my pride decree, that all the world may know of Kirtas Asen, whose face is as the sun at noon for its brightness, and whose rule is just to all the peoples, that they may bow themselves before me, and that the glory of my name may be told throughout the world forever."

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*Owing to the paucity of synonymous terms in this language several of the words of this inscription are capable of alternative translation. "Viceroy," as I have rendered it, was literally "second" or "inferior ruler." "Second sceptre" may also be rendered "slaves by the ten thousand." Variation in the meaning of a word was expressed by emphasis or inflexion of the voice; the language itself is poor in its range of terms. Thus both for nouns and pronouns singular and plural are expressed by the same word, the inflexion of the verb determining the speaker's meaning. Its small vocabulary and kinship with all Aryan tongues deriving from a Sanskrit base made it an easy language for anyone familiar with any one of the languages in or between Tangier and, say, Calcutta.

THE stupendous, unquestioned majesty of that arrogant decree robbed even Watkins of his usual cynical comment. One had but to look at the stately beauty of the city, and in thought to re-people it with the multitudes who once trod its hewn avenues, to realize that its founder had some cause for his magnificent challenge to eternity.

"What must 'An, the mother of hewn cities,' have been?" I questioned.

Eve smiled at me, and I realized what I had done. It was a simple sentence, and unconsciously I had spoken it in her language. Part of my attempts at mastery of the language consisted in putting my unspoken thoughts into words, and with no other task to occupy me I was making amazing progress.

"'An,' I take it, was the capital of Atlantis," Watkins commented, "and it must have been such a city as the modern world has never dreamed. They held life and labour cheaply in their day—I can imagine those 'slaves by the ten thousand' quarrying away here, and the overseers with their whips."

"And the jubilation when all was done," Bent added.

We stood in silence for awhile. The terms of that majestic, magniloquent decree were like the coupled music of some great organ, and I felt myself no longer heir of the ages, but a puny mite, son of a weakling age compared with that of the men who hewed Kir-Asa the mighty and laid that enduring road with the stones they took away.

Watkins went up and rubbed the corner of the tablet. The centuries had thinned the gold, but still the decree of Kirtas-Asen showed clear in the quaint characters of his time. The gold itself was not set in the stone in any fashion we know and practice, but in some way was melted in, the metal and stone blended into one fabric—the edge of the tablet was a sort of vignetting, gold fading to grey rock.

"They were a wonderful people," I remarked. "They had a written language, knew the uses of metals, had a definite system of government over all the known world, obviously good navigators. . . ."

"I've noticed one thing in which they beat the Roman civilization," Watkins observed. "Rome built aqueducts—these people knew that water finds its own level. In the stone piping in Ag's house, the water comes down from somewhere—the pipe slants upward to the baths."

We found a replica of this tablet, later, blended into the rock wall of the great central hall in the king's house, indicating that it had been the palace of Kirtas-Asen in his pride. From beyond the palace the avenue continued to the farther wall of the city, while a second great highway at right angles to this combined with it to cut Kir-Asa into four equal sections. For its full length this second great avenue was bordered on both sides by windowless, single-chambered erections, the storehouses of which the viceregal decree made mention. These storehouses were massive oblongs with circular stone doors that rolled back into their walls like those of the city's gateway.

"Look," said Watkins, and pointed up to a recessed panel over one of these doorways. The panel was carved with a design of wheat-ears, and this people among whom we had come had never known wheat or its uses. The storehouse, about ninety feet in depth by sixty in width, and as high as the wall of the city, was empty, as we found by going inside. The solid rock roof was supported on three rows of plain pillars; the whole appeared to have been excavated from the solid—we could find no trace of any stone having been laid.

"This place is past wondering at," Watkins said. "It makes the Pyramids seem mere jerry-building."

We went out. Watkins and Ner led the way, Bent followed them, and for an instant I lingered with Eve in the shadow beyond the open door. We spoke no word—there was no more between us than a glance of eyes that spoke the story on which the world is based, and, questioning, won the reply desired. It was a definite stage in our intimacy, an advance that could not have been more clearly marked by spoken words. Then, the good moment passed, we followed silently where the others had gone.

It may be—I have not enough experience to know—unique that Eve admitted, without seeking to retract, these advances—she was above coquetry, in spite of the mischievous gaiety that lighted some of her moods. I am biased with regard to her but from the first she seemed to me to possess some of the breadth of outlook, the fineness of character, that marked Watkins and made me admire him. There was nothing small about Eve, no petulance, nor indecision; knowing a thing—even this—she admitted the knowledge freely; she was above subterfuge, and would have made a poor conspirator.

In another of the great storehouses we visited, hexagonal ingots of corroded metal still occupied three-fourths of the interior. I scratched an ingot, and found that in the dryness of this place the corrosion had been but slight—under it showed the white alloy of which the head of the spear I had brought had been forged, but these ingots were soft and untempered.

The metal was used by the smiths of the country for practically all its needs; there had been stores of iron as well, but rust had eaten it all away and left great masses of scaly, powdery oxide, which the present race left untouched, as of no use to them. I concluded that the white alloy was the "metal of peace" mentioned in the vaunting decree, while iron would be the "metal of war."

"What are you thinking, Faulkner?" Watkins asked as we stood in the white metal storehouse. It was one of several—we entered three—and there were thousands of tons of the stuff, still untouched.

"I was wondering what Kirtas-Asen would say if he could come back and see this weak little people, cut off from all the world, occupying his city and forgetting to do reverence to his pride," I said.

"He'd swear, hard," Watkins affirmed confidently. "And I'd like to hear him."

He gave me a thought, and I turned to Eve:

"What are your gods?" I asked.

It was a subject on which we had not thought to touch before. She bowed her head in reverence at mention of the word. "The twin gods, lords of life and death, Oneta and Rak," she said. "Three days are set apart each year, after the gathering of the maize harvest, for their worship."

"And you believe in a life after this?" I questioned again.

"Of course," she answered with a smile. "Why else should we live here? Beyond the stars all live again."

THERE was a ritual, as simple as her unquestioning faith, which was used for the three sacred days of the year, and much singing. But—a good point—there was no priestly order; the five lords of the council were responsible to the king for knowledge of the ritual being maintained, and for the observance of the sacred period, and there the matter ended. It was natural; a contented, pastoral and agricultural people had no need to propitiate the gods overmuch, and thus there was little incentive to a complication of rites and observances.

One other storehouse—we visited it last in our tour of inspection of the transverse avenue—demands mention. It stood near the centre of the city, in the angle where this avenue intersected the other and was broken by the space surrounding the royal house. It was comparatively small, about thirty feet by twenty, and not more than fifteen feet from floor to roof, with one central row of supporting columns. It was not quite half-filled with hexagonal bars of soft, pure gold, each about twenty pounds in weight, as nearly as I could judge.

We gazed in utter, almost stupefied silence. Here, as Ag had told us, was gold by the thousand tons—Kirtas-Asen must have ransacked the world, and yet probably at "An, the mother of hewn cities" the store had been greater still. It lay unvalued, useless, such a treasure as no men have seen before or since—I thought then that if we got back to the coast we might take a couple of bars apiece across the trembling bridge and up the ledge of the great chasm, but no more. Kir-Asa could give us wealth beyond any man's imaginings, but we could not move it from the place.

"From this metal our smiths fashion ornaments," Eve told us, "but it is too heavy and too soft for the uses of our people. It endures the passing of time without rust."

What a comment, I thought, on the futility of avarice! We stood before the greatest treasure in the world, by our standards, and because of its weight and softness "a bar of it wouldn't buy a duck's egg, here," as Watkins put it.

We passed to streets faced by dwellings of hewn quartz, magnificent, desolate, with fragments of the stone from their carvings lying unheeded in the empty ways: there were great carven-fronted mansions, unused, with gaping doorways and dust inches thick on their floors; there were open spaces with withered and deserted gardens, and statuary of which the design had been worn and rounded from its original intent by the winds and rains of countless centuries.

For the three days before the assembly of the council we explored, finding new wonders at every turn, and wearying Ner and Eve by our persistent questioning. One thing struck me—there were no tombs; the present race cremated its dead, the custom being possibly a legacy from the wonderful civilization that had produced Kir-Asa the mighty.

In one of the deserted open places, surrounded by pillared palaces of magnificent design, I paused with Eve beside me to look around.

"This would look wonderful by moonlight," I said, realizing how the softer light of night would cover all traces of decay. But Eve shook her head.

"None come to the deserted places by night," she said.

"Why not?" I asked.

But she looked at me in a distressed way without replying, and I recalled how both she and her mother had looked when Watkins spoke of the apparitions of the valley amphitheatre. Did the "ghosts who chase women" haunt the dead quarters of this city too? I wondered.

The last night but one before the trial, Bent, sitting on his bed, gave vent to his thoughts.

"How long do we stay here, Watkins?" he asked.

"Till after our trial," Watkins answered reflectively. "Why?"

"I was wondering what we get out of it, after all," Bent said.

"So far as you are concerned," Watkins retorted, "you get what I agreed to pay you when we made our bargain, and in addition to that you can have as much gold as you care to carry away."

Bent made a sort of hopeless gesture. "How do you think we'll get away?" he asked. "The way we came?"

"Certainly not," Watkins answered bitingly. "I'm asking Ag to-morrow to have a tunnel driven straight from here to Singapore. We're to be shot through it by pneumatic pressure, like those cash delivery systems in department stores."

Bent looked furious—I could not restrain a laugh.

"Ah, well!" he said, "if one of you simply means to play the fool with a woman while the other dodders round mouldy antiquities, I've no more to say."

"That," Watkins said, "is our loss. Goodnight, Bent."

I looked for an explosion, but Bent lay down to sleep without deigning to reply.

The next night we were very quiet over our meal. The boy Ner did most of the talking; the rest of us felt the coming ordeal weigh heavily on us. Ag was unusually kindly and courteous, even for him, and specially attentive to me. I could converse with him now with tolerable freedom, and I noticed how he referred to Eve's tuition and its results, complimenting me on my quickness. After the meal, he did not leave us to go out, as was his custom, but went instead to one of the apartments giving on to the great central hall, and signed to me to follow.

I entered the room for the first time. Its stone floor was covered with skins, its settees were comfortably padded and had raised ends which formed back rests, and altogether it was the most luxurious room of all that I had seen. A dozen or so of the oil lamps that these people used diffused light on its fittings.

"Jack, son of Faulk," Ag began baldly enough, "I am not a blind man."

"Far from it," I said.

"You are a stranger, a man of magic, but in you I see a man of truth."

There was no possible reply to the compliment that I could think of—for such it was, though obviously Ag was not talking for the sake of complimenting me.

"I have no liking for the plan of Philip my kinsman. In it is danger, and should it fail my house is doomed. Yet the king is very near to death, and my daughter Eve is very dear to me."

AGAIN I kept silence, though Ag seemed to wait reply.

"If I gave her to any man, betrothal would save her from Comin-Saya, should the king die," he explained. "I know the trial waits you with the morn, but as head of the council I might save one, or two."

"We three are as one," I answered readily enough now. "As one we came and as one we stand."

Ag hesitated. "Or I might save three," he said slowly. Perhaps the offer was put forward without any hope of being able to fulfil it, to win my consent to his plan, and perhaps he hoped to save us all.

I nodded. "We three are as one," I said again.

He let it pass. "If of her own desire—I am not blind, Jack son of Faulk—if of her own desire Eve my daughter were held betrothed to you, and so known if the king should die. . . ."

He waited, wondering if I understood the proposal clearly. I thought of Eve as she had been with me these past three days, of Eve transported from this hidden land to an everyday life—in a dozen seconds I saw her in as many different phases, and made decision.

"Then," I said, "her desire would be mine."

Ag looked at me steadily. "To hold and cherish in your own land as in this," he said, "to own and proclaim in disregard of

race or inequality of knowledge—life is not play, Jack son of Faulk, and a girl's heart is a fragile thing. To hold thus?"

"More," I answered. "To love, to serve, and to stand beside in pride, Ag, father of Eve."

He looked at me, almost peered into my face, as if questioning me to the uttermost. Then he drew back.

"Wait," he bade, and left me.

Minutes passed while I stood, understanding how Ag planned to gain his end without the risks involved by Watkins' suggestion. In my own mind was no doubt, no questioning; if the trial had not awaited us, if the way to the coast lay open and easy to-morrow, I had no wish to go, leaving Eve behind. As Watkins had phrased it, this was the big thing for me, and I would not let it go.

The rustle of light footsteps on the covered floor sounded as Eve came toward me, her face grave, her steps unhurrying and unfaltering. I stretched out my hands, and she laid her own within them, her eyes downcast. Then she looked up at me for an instant, and wordlessly came closer—I felt her arms go round my neck as I held her. . . .

The shadow of the morrow took away constraint. She nestled close to me, held me as if from the judgment of the council, and to me her love and trust were wonderful.

"Though it be but for this hour, lord of my heart, I am glad," she whispered.

"Have no fear, sweet," I told her. "To-morrow will pass and leave me to love you."

"Here, or beyond the stars," she answered, "as forever my love is yours. Yet for this hour I would have you hold me close, close, lest another day should find me left with naught but the memory for my gain."

Her whispered, ecstatic sentences come back to me as I write. Only once in life is possible such happiness as made that hour wonderful, and I knew that whatever Kir-Asa held for Bent and Watkins, it had given me all that man could ask, the ultimate heart's desire.

We went back to the great central hall, my hand on Eve's shoulder, and only Ag and Watkins were there—the rest had gone. Watkins smiled at me—or rather grinned—in his own complacent way. I paused before where Ag sat.

"Daughter of mine," he said, "I give you gladly, if it is your will."

"It is her will," I ventured to speak for her, "as mine. Count not that you lose a daughter, but that here, or half a world away, you are richer by another son."

"My thanks for that," he answered sincerely. "I trust her to you without fear."

When we had got to our own rooms, Watkins grinned at me again.

"Why twist your face about like that?" I asked. "It's unnecessary."

"I can see through Ag's little game," he answered. "Your wish happens to fit in with it. Well, it seems to be the big thing for you, and that being so you have all my good wishes."

"And Ag will not be king," I remarked.

"As to that," Watkins answered deliberately, "we shall see what we shall see. We've got enough to think about to-morrow, anyhow."

CHAPTER V

COUP D'ÉTAT

WE PUT on our own clothes on the morning of the trial; I remarked—the suggestion of discarding native attire and facing the council in our own was mine, because I happened to be first awake—that if things went against us we had a country to be proud of, and might as well own it when we went to face our fate.

"Precisely," Watkins agreed. "If only I had a mouth-organ, I'd play us up the street to the tune of 'Rule Britannia.'"

But before we went down to breakfast he grew grave for a minute.

"Boys," he said, "we're hard against it to-day, perhaps, in spite of Ag—he's only one, and we've broken a law that stands for the safety of these people. I'm morally responsible for bringing you here, and I hope to be responsible for taking you back a little richer than you came, somehow. Now one handshake all round before we go to face the music, and may we congratulate each other here this evening—unless Faulkner is otherwise engaged."

He could not resist the final dig at me. I am glad to recall that friendly, cheery handclasp, for which Bent seemed to put aside his aloofness in the knowledge that we two admitted no difference between his position and our own, so far as the coming trial was in question. We had come as one, we stood as one, and in the face of danger Bent felt and owned it.

We breakfasted without Ag, who had gone out early, and without Niala, and afterward Eve and I slipped away for a precious half hour, of which I have nothing to

tell—it belongs to us two alone. Then I heard Bent calling, and left Eve with as good a word of hope as I could contrive, telling her that I would come back to her.

"Or it may be that I shall come to you again," she said, smiling bravely. "Here or beyond the stars, my beloved, in life or in death, I wait alone without you."

Bent called again, and I had to go. Looking back from the doorway of the room, I saw Eve standing with her arms outstretched as if to draw me back to her, and still she tried to smile till I should be gone.

We buckled on our revolvers and ammunition belts, but decided not to take our rifles—they were too conspicuous. At the entrance to the mansion an escort of six spearmen, sent by Ag, waited to precede us to the palace, more as escort than as guard, for they marched in pairs before us. Watkins pointed to their uniforms of fairly dark blue linen.

"If we'd gone to heaven instead of coming here," he remarked, "we'd have found Peter backed up on the gate by a squad of police in the same old blue. I do detest this lack of originality."

For my part, I remembered Ag's words about saving us all, spoken to me the night before, but in spite of them I knew that we might be nearer that squad of heavenly policemen than the length of a normal life. But there was nothing for it but to take such medicine as fate chose to administer, without shuddering over the dose. And so, as unconcernedly as if it were merely an appearance in respect of unpaid income tax, we followed our escort toward the palace.

We passed between them when they ranked off, three a side, at the spacious entrance, and raised their spear heads before their faces in token of salute as we marched in. The six of them, in the arching vastness of that royal portal, were no more than ants trying to look impressive at the edges of a garden path, but they gave me a thought of the splendour that must have been in the days of Kirtas-Asen and his ten thousand slaves.

We marched in, and the nave of Canterbury cathedral is not more nobly proportioned nor more impressive than the central hall of the king's palace in Kir-Asa—and Canterbury was built, while this was hewn. Two great rows of pillars went up to the arching roof in splendid fluted symmetry, spreading at their tops to carven designs. At the far end was the only glazed window we saw in the city, to these people the greatest treasure of their land, a thing beyond all price. Thick as was the glass, a pane here and there had been broken in the course of ages, but the fragments had been carefully gathered up and reset in such metal framing as one sees in old-fashioned casement windows. By the pale tints remaining in the glass, I judged that this window had once been brilliantly coloured, but that the hues had faded out during the centuries of its existence.

There were perhaps a couple of hundred people lost in the vastness of the hall, midway up which was set one of the great stone tablets of the country, with, at its farther end, a great stone chair or throne that faced toward the door. On either side of the throne were two more stone chairs, not quite so sumptuous in their carving nor so high in the seats, and at the right-hand side of the table stood a group of a dozen blue-clad spearmen. I guessed that these last were intended to form a sort of ceremonial guard about us for the trial. We three stalked up with all the dignity at our command to the great stone table and there waited, facing the onlookers. Our footsteps wakened a resonance of echoes that took a long time to die out among the arches of the roof above us.

I HAD just time to take stock of those onlookers, and to observe that there were no women among them, before Ag, Neray, and three others who were evidently the remaining lords of the council entered through a doorway on the left of the hall. Ag came to us and greeted us in friendly fashion, but made no move to introduce us to our judges—Neray and the other three stood by the four chairs on either side of the throne. Standing by us, Ag looked at the spectators present. I saw him frown and shake his head.

"It is forbidden," he muttered angrily. "They know it is forbidden."

"What is forbidden?" I asked, trying to see the cause of his annoyance.

"See there, the three who stand bearing spears. He on the right is Comin-Saya, the king's heir. Next to him is Manos, and Macer stands on the left. It is forbidden that any man save the guards shall bear arms in this hall at a meeting of the council."

For this race, the three brothers were undersized men; Comin-Saya was shortest, and Macer tallest. The face of Comin-Saya was piggish, with little deep-set eyes and thick lips; Manos looked to be a poor

type, and Macer had a face of foxy cunning—of the three, I judged him cleverest and most to be feared. While I observed them, they came forward to within a little distance of the lower end of the council table.

"Ner Ag?" Comin-Saya called, in a high, thin voice. "Rumour has come to me that the daughter I demand of you for wife is betrothed to a wandering stranger in our land. Speaks rumour truly, Ner-Ag?"

"Comin-Saya," Ag answered, "I bear with you and your brethren, being now your lord, as when you are king you in turn must bear with me and with the people of my house. Yet how is it that you, who some day must decree and proclaim the law, now break the law, bearing arms in the hall of the council?"

"It was our will to bear them," Manos, the second brother growled, in a tone as far below the normal as was his brother's above it.

Comin-Saya bade him be silent, and took up the argument. "Ner-Ag," he piped, "I demand of you your daughter while she is yet free to consent, before the time is when I can take her unconsenting. I would have a willing bride."

"Were she free to consent, still would I give no answer while you stand armed in the hall of council," Ag thrust back at him—and there was no small courage in this defiance of the man who would one day, and that perhaps very near, hold power of life and death over both Ag and Eve his daughter. "Put down your spears, you and your brothers, wait the end of the council's sitting, and then unarmed bring forward your requests, as is the right of all subjects of the council which sits in the absence of the king."

I saw Comin-Saya half raise his spear, and his little eyes twinkled with rage—I could well believe that insanity was hereditary in his family, seeing him as he was then. He took a step forward, beyond his brothers.

"Say not that rumour speaks truly, Ner-Ag, for I will tear that daughter of yours from any man's arms when my day comes."

"Peace!" Ag thundered at him, and the echoes of the word rolled round the hall. "Disarm, ere you be dragged before the council to answer for your words! My daughter is beyond your power, betrothed to this my guest. To that matter there is end, since the law shields her from even the king's claim. Now put down your arms and come up for judgment of the council, before you go back to your wine cups!"

Macer smiled evilly, but the face of Manos worked with rage at these bold words, and Comin-Saya slavered in utter fury—he was near on the madness that held his father from ruling, I saw. Suddenly he raised the spear he held and hurled it at us.

AS ONE may watch a glass fall and yet be unable to arrest its splintering on the floor, so was I able to follow the spear through the score yards of its flight. Whether by accident or by design of the throw, the blade twirled in the air as the weapon flew, and as it neared us I jerked back my head just in time. Blade and haft hissed past my face, almost touching me, and the point took Bent between the eyes, cleaving his skull so that he crumpled to the floor without a sound. In reality, a second sufficed to turn argument to tragedy, though to me the time between the casting of the spear and Bent's fall was long drawn out.

He had not fallen before the report of Watkins' revolver crashed and thundered with terrific suddenness through the great hall, and then my own weapon—I have no recollection of drawing it from its holster, the movement must have been instinctive—set a second volley of deafening echoes rolling round and above us.

Watkins' shot took Comin-Saya between the eyes, and mine hit Manos, who had raised his spear and stood poised in the act of throwing, in the breast. Comin-Saya fell dead as quietly as Bent had fallen, but Manos spun around, dropped to his knees, eased himself to proneness by his arms, and voiced his protest at so sudden an end with a moan that ended in a shuddering sigh. Thus beside the body of his brother he died, and I felt a little, fearful thrill at the death of this first man to fall by my hand.

Macer, the youngest brother of the three, who had watched and made no move, dropped his spear clattering on the rock floor and fled out through the great portal of the hall. The spectators would have followed after a brief interval of frozen terror at the roaring death and sight of the curling smoke from the pistol muzzles, but Watkins' voice pealed high and clear as they began to move.

"Halt!" he called. "Or die as these have died!" and they halted where they stood. The four members of the council leaned aghast and trembling on their chairs, and even Ag, who knew us for his friends,

looked fearfully at us, lords, as it seemed to him, of life and death.

"People of Kir-Asa," Watkins called again, "you have our power. These sons of a madman smote unawares, and of us killed one. For that one life have we taken two, and if again a hand should be raised against us we will take not two but twenty, except that the hand raised against us be a just hand, acting by the law. In proof of this we three, two living and one dead, are here to be judged of the council in that matter of which we are accused."

It was a subtle touch of his, that of submitting to justice in spite of the possession of such power as these people had never seen before. Now Ag, recovering from his fright as soon as any, bade the guards bear out the bodies of the king's sons, and also take away Bent's body to a separate chamber of the palace to await cremation. But before this last was done I knelt beside Bent and stripped off him the revolver belt—the heavy spear had driven right through the skull, its point protruding an inch or more behind.

Watkins and I gave the limp hand a farewell grip apiece before they took him away; he had come through much with us, and we both remembered his premonition regarding the evil that Kir-Asa would bring him. He had fought the premonition, and how hard the fight had been we could not tell; thus we bade good-bye to our companion—companion no more.

Ag roused himself and the members of the council to their tasks, for which, after this exhibition of the power that we held, they had small liking. He took his place on the central throne while yet the blue-clad guards mopped up the blood of the king's sons from the floor; but, before he could speak to open the trial, footsteps came pattering from the door through which Ag himself had entered the hall, and an old, white-bearded man took his stand at the lower end of the great rock table.

"My lords of the council," he cried, "Saya-Comin the king is dead."

And, having given his message, he went back the way he had come. Ag made a little, impatient gesture, as if events crowded on him too swiftly, and he did not like it.

"Let us take our tasks in order, for they are heavy," he said. "First are we gathered to judge these strangers for the slaying of the Nantia, but judgment is now of no avail. For he who slew the Nantia lies slain by Comin-Saya the king's son, and these two, his accessories, have no rights in this our land. Thus how shall we doom the slayer, who is already dead, to death, or deprive his accessories to the slaying, who have no rights, of their rights? If that matter is ended, stand, members of the council, in token that it is passed."

THE four rose to their feet as one, and as one sat down again—Ag's statement of the case and his conclusion were unanswerable. Ag looked from his throne toward us two. "Philip son of Wat Kins and Jack son of Faulk, by the order of the council are you now free. Let the use of your magic be tempered by the justice of the council."

"Set them not free yet," said Neray, "for there is yet another matter, Ner-Ag. By their magic they take for one life the lives of two men, yet since both those men bore arms in the hall of council, and sought to take the lives of the strangers, it may be that they were not to blame. Yet, if Saya-Comin the king died *before* Comin-Saya his son threw the spear, then is Philip son of Wat Kins slayer of Comin-Saya who at his father's death was king, so that Jack son of Faulk is likewise slayer of a king. Now in the hands of the king is power of life and death—Comin-Saya being king by the death of his father, none may dream of vengeance on him should he decree death or with his own hand slay. So runs the law, Ner-Ag. Have these strangers taken just vengeance on the subjects of the council, or have they each slain a king?"

"Put like a lawyer," Watkins muttered to me, and I saw the quandary in which Ag was placed. If the king had died before his sons, then were we two subject to doom more surely than for the killing of the monkey woman. For the person of the king was sacred to an even greater degree than was that of Nantia, and Ag, as head of the council, dared not attempt to protect us if we had each killed a king, as Neray put it. His position demanded that he deal out strict justice, and this even more now that the succession to the throne was made matter for question by Macer's flight from the hall.

I saw by his face that he thought swiftly. He might have put this matter off awhile, tried to gain time, but he elected to risk a chance.

"Stand, strangers, not yet being free, and since we would judge this matter with justice refrain from your magic," he bade. "Let a guard be sent to bring here the

"None came to the deserted places by night."

messengers who brought news of the king's death, and the physicians who were with him when he died."

A blue-clad guard went instantly, and we waited. "He's gambling on time," Watkins said to me, "and I admire the way he takes the risk. Anyhow, we have five chambers apiece left without reloading, and Bent's revolver hasn't been fired, while apart from the guards there isn't another weapon in the place."

"As prisoners, wait silently," Ag bade, and we spoke no more.

Four men came into the council hall through the door by which Ag had entered—evidently it led directly to the state apartments of the palace. They came, all old and bearded men, to the foot of the council table, and there waited to learn their errand.

"Let him who among you best knows tell us the manner of King Saya-Comin's death," Ag commanded.

The four consulted among themselves, and finally the one who had come as messenger and announced the king's death took upon himself to speak—we two took a grip on ourselves, knowing that our fate hung on the next few minutes, and prepared to play our game out either way.

"Lords of the council," said the old man, "Saya-Comin the king raved about his chamber until he fell as one exhausted, and we took him up and placed him on his bed where he lay and breathed heavily for a while. Then there came a great crashing noise like to the first. Thereat Saya-Comin the king rose upon his bed, and cried out, 'My sons—alas, my sons!' as one who mourned. And with the words he fell back, so dying."

"It is enough," said Ag. "We need no more word than this." And the four old men returned whence they had come.

"My lords," Ag said, when the witnesses had gone, "Saya-Comin lived to hear the thunder that slew Comin-Saya, and the thunder by which Manos died. Not for the space in which I speak these words, not for the time of one swift-taken breath, was either brother king, and these strangers slew men, subjects of the council that sits in the absence of the king, and who against all law bore arms in the hall of the council, seeking to compass their deaths. Say now, is there aught against the strangers?"

No voice answered him, but I saw Neray look vindictively at me, as if he would have found something against me if he could.

"Stand," Ag bade again, "if you agree my decision, that the strangers now go free."

As one the four stood and reseated themselves again, and with precisely the formula and exhortation he had used before, again Ag told us that we were free. But we did not go.

"The fun is just going to begin, now," Watkins said to me, "and I think I'll take a hand in the plucking of this particular crow."

I STEPPED back to where the blue-clad spearmen stood grouped—so swiftly and unceremoniously had events swept on the assembly here that the formality of guarding us had not been observed—and was amused to see how they all recoiled from me as I moved—the memory of the vengeance we had taken on the king's sons was fresh on them, and they had no wish to get close to us. But I bade them have no fear, for I had need of a man from among them. One stepped out at the bidding of their chief.

"Go to the house of Ner-Ag," I ordered. "Seek out Eve, daughter of Ner-Ag, and tell her that Jack, son of Faulk, is unharmed and free."

He went unquestioningly. We might have bidden any man there pull out the great window of the council hall, that day, and won obedience, so mighty did they hold us. And this message I had longed to send, from the moment Ag's judgment was spoken; I could picture Eve waiting hungrily, as I should have waited had the danger been hers, every minute an age, every passing footstep a torture of disappointment. Hence I was glad to see that blue-clad back disappearing in the vastness of the entrance.

This done, I turned to see deadlock in the council. Had Comin-Saya been alive, there had been no council by this time. Had Macer not fled, not only would there have been no council, but Ag, Watkins, and myself had been in sorry case, probably awaiting execution (except that Watkins and I had our revolvers as arguments against such a settlement of the case) for having killed the king's brother, since Macer as king would hold power of life and death.

Now by the strict letter of the law of this country, Macer *was* king, in spite of his flight. Equally past question, if Ag acknowledged Macer's kingship, he virtually signed his own death warrant, to say nothing of ours. The four remaining lords of the council, bound by the form of the law even more than Ag, were in a quan-

dary. They wanted to acknowledge Macer as king, in accordance with the law, but between them and such a course stood—or rather sat—Ag, still possessed of more power than any one of them by virtue of his position, and backed as well by our terrible power, of which a most forcible example had recently been given to all present.

Watkins was right—the climax of the day's doings was to come. Ag, who would probably have submitted to the decrees of fate and Macer had he been left to his own devices, had had a way of escape shown him. By Eve's betrothal to me he had tried to avoid that way, but now he was driven to taking it—he had no choice, except the unthinkable choice of recalling Macer and submitting to his wrath. And, for his own safety, to get the full effect of the blow, he must strike at once, before Macer could get in a word to anyone who held power in the land. Here, for the present, were concentrated the heads of power, and here must Ag make his stand. Watching him while the council sat in silence, and the spectators divided their attention between us two standing alone by the table and the five seated lords, I could tell from his face when he had made up his mind.

He stood, a noble figure of a man, to proclaim his will, and for a few seconds his gaze rested on us two, as if he would bespeak our aid.

"Guests of our country, lords of the council, and men of Kir-Asa," he began, "the council of five is dissolved, for King Saya-Comin, in whose name the council ruled, is dead. Thus I, Ner-Ag, head of the council, proclaim its dissolution as its last decree.

"Yet there is no king. Comin-Saya is dead, Manos is dead, and Macer as subject has broken the law and fled from the justice of the council. Shall he who so lightly holds the law of the land rule over us, lords and people of Kir-Asa?"

He paused, and in the pause a buzz of amazed questionings began and grew among the spectators, while the four lords of the council in their chairs stared at each other. It was not that they questioned the reasoning of his words, but law and custom held them so firmly bound that to question the authority of the royal house was a thing past their imagining; that Ner-Ag, the greatest man in the country under the king, should asperse royalty was a thing incredible.

"Two generations of the house of Saya-Comin have, by their madness, made need for a council to rule in their stead," Ag went on, and the murmuring of voices in the hall ceased as he spoke. "The land is in the hands of its lords, not in the hands of its king, for half the time of a reign and more. Lords of the council, shall this thing be again? Will you"—and by quoting Watkins he proved how deeply that tempter's words had bitten in—"be slaves to a custom, submitting yourselves to a race that breeds madmen generation by generation, giving them power of life and death over you and your sons and daughters? Or will you set up a king who shall deal justly, walk among you as one competent to rule, hold to the laws and in royal truth command the people of the land? Choose, and your choice is between a whip to lash your backs and a hand to aid serf* and lord alike at need."

Such a straight and manly appeal to reason, one would imagine, should have won a single, instant reply, but there came no reply at all. The two hundred or more who had come to witness our trial waited a lead, if they had an opinion on the subject; the lords of the council sat hesitating, and perhaps each of them wondering if by any chance he were the strong man competent to rule, to whom Ag referred. I had a strong suspicion that when, by implication, Ag referred to Macer as "a whip to lash your backs," he was not innocent of a tender regard for his own shoulder blades, but that was only natural.

HE STOOD, having said his say, and the silence that followed was not unlike the uncomfortable pause that follows after a joke has fallen flat—there was a similar lack of response to the appeal to enthusiasm, and the situation was perilously near anti-climax when Watkins saved it. He counted on dramatic effect to win response; with a disgusted ejaculation of "Sheep!" he made one leap, and stood on the council table. There, he stretched a pointing finger at Ag, standing before the throne, and cried out in the best melodramatic style:

"Lords of the council, rise! There stands your king!"

They came on their feet like automata when the conjurer pulls the string, and as for the people in the hall, what was good enough for the lords of the council was not for them to question. There were beads of perspiration on Ag's brow when

*The expression translated as "serf" could also be rendered "man" or "craftsman."

the terrible suspense ended for him, and he sat back in the throne with an audible sigh of relief.

Still striking on hot iron, Watkins leaped down again from the table, marched to its end and bowed before the occupant of the throne of Kir-Asa. "O king," he said, "reign over this people justly and in peace, you and your house forever. These lords of the provinces, standing here beside you, wait to declare their loyalty to your rule."

His back was toward me, and I wondered if he had his tongue in his cheek as he flung out this more than hint to the four lords. For my part, I thought it was the most appalling impudence, from the point of view of these people, that he, an unknown stranger, should take the direction of their affairs into his own hands like this.

By causing the four lords to declare their allegiance to Ag in presence of a couple of hundred witnesses, he would blaze the news all over Kir-Asa and the country beyond that Ag was supported by the representatives of all the power there was—he would commit these lords to a definite course and so wreck Macer's chance of winning adherents anywhere. It was sound policy, from Ag's point of view, but it was a daring, an impudent thing for Watkins to do.

Yet the colossal impudence of it helped in winning the desired effect; those two revolver shots and their result went far to add weight to Watkins' suggestion, and the inexorable, relentless logic of the situation had weight too. The position was without precedent; had Macer returned, for all these lords knew a third clap of thunder might have reunited him to his brothers—and would that it had been so! Meanwhile, here sat their best man, claiming kingship, or in any case suggesting it, with his case backed by beings who threatened to take twenty lives for an attempt on one, and seemed capable of enforcing their threat.

The four lords were not anxious to declare their allegiance, but they did it. At a silent, slight gesture from Watkins, he who was evidently the oldest of them came before the throne, bowed before Ag, dropped on one knee, and with upraised hand promised to "hold my lands in trust and subject to the will of Ner-Ag, king, whom I acknowledge as given power of life and death throughout the land, and whose commands I obey at all times and in every place." It was a formula, and there was more of it; these few words I remember.

Last, as youngest of the four, came Neray, and spoke the prescribed words. It irked him to say them, I saw, for Eve had been removed beyond his reach, and he could not forgive Ag's consent to the removal. His feeling was natural, I had to own; I was a stranger, an outsider whom nobody knew, while he was a fifth of the power of the land; the slight to him was not small.

Yet he promised. Then, mindful of the need for dramatic effect with such a people, Watkins turned to the watching throng, who had edged nearer, deeply interested in this—to them—epoch-marking series of events. In effect it was a revolution, yet never was a revolution so easily accomplished.

"Have you no word of welcome for your king, Ner-Ag?" Watkins called.

He struck the right note; Ag was well liked, and the roar of welcome that went up at his question was marred by no dissentient voice. The three provincial lords joined in, and Neray had another cause for grudge against me, for he saw that I noted his silence.

There ensued a pause. I thought of Eve, waiting, wondering.

"Lords and people of Kir-Asa," the new king's voice fell on our ears, "this first day of my reign wears on. Let messengers be sent forth bearing to all people my first decree: the time of sowing is past; the time of harvest is yet to come. Let there be three days rest from labour throughout the land, beginning at dawn of the second day from now, that all men may honour this occasion as shall please them best.

"And my second decree: for the fourth part of the day that falls before noon, each day will I sit to hear the request of any man who shall come before me, lawfully and bearing no arms, in this my royal justice hall. And if any cause should prevent my thus sitting, one shall sit here in my place, as I for the time decree.

"So I, Ner-Ag, decree. Go forth."

"Good man," said Watkins to me. "I wondered if he'd know how to drop the curtain at the end of the act."

NERAY, going out, passed us, and as he went he murmured a sentence of Ag's first decree—"The time of sowing is past, the time of harvest is yet to come."

Watkins looked after him. "My friend," he soliloquised, "I'm perfectly certain you're still qualifying for that thick ear, and you'll get it, yet."

Ag let Neray go, but bade friendly goodbyes to the three provincial lords, telling them that he desired them to remain in the city for the next few days, and to confer with him here each morning. Since Neray's place was in the city his presence could be commanded at any time. It was evident that Ag had foreseen and thought out the possibilities of royalty since Watkins first put the thought into his mind—those two decrees were too apt to the occasion to be spontaneous.

There remained with Ag and us two in the council hall some thirty spearmen, who ranged themselves in two lines between us and the doorway, and stood with their spears held at the salute, the broad blades almost hiding their faces; the spectators had all gone out at Ag's command. We passed between the two lines of guards, and when they had fallen in to follow us as escort, I ventured a question.

"King," I said, "how knew you that it was Ce Cil son of Bent who slew the Nantia?"

Ag looked at me with twinkling eyes. "I did not know," he answered, "but in causing it to be thought I freed you two of further charge in the matter."

So that was that. We went down the avenue to Ag's house, and he paused to dismiss our escort at the entrance. Then, looking into the central hall of the house, he sighed a little. It looked homely and familiar after the bare splendour of the great royal hall.

"This was my home," Ag said. "Will that palace be home for me?"

It was a natural thought, but another thought held my mind from dwelling on it with him. I gave way for him to enter and pass straight up the hall, while for my part I turned and passed through a doorway that I knew to where one was waiting—oh, so eagerly and so patiently! For minutes there was no word between us, and I knew, to the full, the wisdom of the one who said that we should measure time by heart-beats, not years. In time, hours had passed since Eve stood with arms outstretched to watch my going, but the hours were no measure of her waiting, nor of the great changes that had come about ere her arms closed about me now and she gave willing lips to meet my own. For me had been the thrill of swift and fateful action, for her the woman's unseeing part.

I recall the light and shadow and light again on her face as I told her how the day had gone. Bent's death—in this my happiness I gave thought to him, so far as might be—Saya-Comin's death, the end of his two sons, the judgment of the council, Ag's kingship; Eve listened bewildered at the kaleidoscopic whirl that flung men about like puppets and turned her world upside down.

"You went prisoners for trial—you return friends of the king," she said wonderingly.

"True, Princess Eve," I answered, "and his daughter's very loyal subject bows before you."

"Nay," she said gravely, "for I am subject to my lord, to whom I have given my love, to whom at his word I give myself. Not even in jest speak thus, until. . . ."

She ended the sentence by hiding her face on my breast, causing another silence that for a while I dared not break, because of the hunger her unfinished sentence gave. At last she looked up at me again.

"Speak as you will, beloved," she said, "lest I think myself back in the time just past, questioning if ever your voice would gladden me again. But first—this for the messenger you sent to me to ease the time of waiting."

"This" was the first kiss she had given me unsought, and of her own will—it was ample repayment. I set down these things, little to others, perhaps, but never little to me, who loved her.

"Eve, my princess," I said after, "if I were impatient, eager to take you at your word. . . ."

"Tell me," she bade, as I paused.

"'To whom at his word I give myself,' you said," I reminded her. "One son of Saya-Comin had gone out free—there may be days of storm, before us. If we faced them side by side. . . ."

For a little time she gazed at me; the colour deepened in her face, and her glorious eyes grew misty. Then slowly, and the surrender of the movement was infinite—she laid her head down on my shoulder, hiding her face. Her words were old as the world, new as today's dawn, wonderful as spring:

"Beloved," she said, "I have given you all my heart—I would slip into the shelter of your arms, to rest."

BEFORE we sat to eat, Ag stood in his place before the table and spoke.

"My guests," he said, "my debt to you is greater than my power of payment. But for your wit and power I had been today helpless in the hands of Comin-Saya, whose will and worth you learned in the

hall of council. You shall ask of the king, your friend, and no one thing that is justly in my power shall be denied to you. I grieve for the empty place at this table, at which tomorrow we shall no more gather, and for a space hold silence that Ce Cil son of Bent may know that we keep him in memory, now that he looks down on us from beyond the stars."

After the silence that he asked, we sat down, a thoughtful party. The old order of things had passed; Ag, thinking that he must leave his home to go to the house of the kings, indicated the magnitude of the change that had come about. I wondered, but did not question yet, what chance Macer would have if he attempted reaction, and I remembered Neray and his allusion to sowing and the harvest to follow.

That night I questioned Ag; it had been decided that Bent's funeral should be held at the morrow's dawn, but there was one other matter on my mind. Ag gave me audience in the room in which he had sounded me with regard to betrothal to Eve.

"Speak freely, Jack son of Faulk," he bade. "Policy drove me to aid you but a day since, yet now the need for that policy has passed I am glad I gave the aid. Ask —I stand to give."

"I ask Eve," I said bluntly. "The times are stark—any day may see us out against Macer, out in defence of you, or even of ourselves—I put things before you at their worst. And this is Eve's will, as mine, that before any storm break on us we have right and your consent to face it together, as one."

"For my part," he answered, "I had rather waited till the storm passed and the sky cleared. Though in your haste is a measure of reason, recall that it is not eight days since you came strangers out of the west."

"Still I ask," I said, realising with difficulty that barely a fortnight had passed since we made the passage of the great chasm.

"And I give," Ag said with a smile, "for how shall I give to my kinsman or his friend to equal their gifts to me? When do you ask?"

"The second day from now," I said.

"Be it so," he agreed. "Jack, friend of my kinsman and friend to me, Ner-Ag, king, may this gift to you be valued at its worth, for it is a great gift."

"If need comes, and you seek our aid again," I said, "you shall see by my repayment whether I do value the gift."

* * *

Next morning we went out at dawn, up to the palace. Beside the stone table in the hall of the council stood a four-handled bier, on which lay that which had been Bent with its face uncovered, and as Ag, Watkins and I entered the hall four of the blue-clad spearmen took up the bier and with it marched out. An escort of sixty spearmen went with the bearers, and in utter silence we three followed.

From the time of our leaving the council hall no word was spoken until we reached our journey's end. We marched out from Kir-Asa at its eastern side, and an uphill road, half the width of the great avenue by which we had come to the city, took us a distance of about three miles to the foot of the volcano Kir. On either side, this avenue was bordered by masses of stone that had once been carved as alternate dinosauri and mastodons, but very few had kept enough of their original form to be recognisable. Here and there, a gigantic, weather-worn neck reared up, or a trunk out-thrust at us as we passed. Then up the volcano's slope, which was easy of ascent, and the spearmen relieved each other in carrying the bier.

At the summit we descended a little way into the crater, only the bearers accompanying us, to a ledge of pumice rock which formed the last stage of this journey. Beneath us was twisting flame and pouring smoke, and on the rock on which we stood were marks where many such biers had rested. Here Watkins and I in turn came to look on Bent's face for the last time, and then Ag spoke the only words of the funeral rite:

"He who was has gone to stand before the lords of life and death—for this material shape he has no more need."

The four men lifted the bier and placed it at a point where the rocky ledge inclined steeply. A slight push, and the bier and body went down to vanish beneath the smoke-curtain that hid the volcano's heart. Then in silence we three turned.

Short as it was, that ritual comprehended all the facts of man's relations to time and eternity.

OF EVE I saw little before sunset of that day, for on her and on Niala developed most of the business of transferring Ag's establishment to the house of the kings, as the royal palace was most commonly called. Ag himself, who had spared time

to come with us for the committal of Bent's body to the flames of Kir, was busied with the three provincial lords until late, settling the redistribution of power consequent on his kingship, and so, practically for the first time since our coming, Watkins and I were left to consider our own selves and futures.

At least, though nominally we were out sight-seeing again, that was the main use to which we put the time. Watkins began by wanting to know what were my plans, in view of my forming the definite tie with Eve. I had to confess that I had no plans.

"I thought not," he said. "Jump at the one thing you want, and damn the cost. Well, it's natural, but think for a minute, Faulkner—do you mean to spend the rest of your life in this country?"

"Certainly not," I retorted. "I mean to take Eve, and go—she's willing, for we've talked it out."

"You would," he commented drily. "There's the danger of her missing her people, and wanting to come back, but it's no use considering that now. By the way, are you thinking of taking her the way of the chasm?"

"Impossible—we must find another way out."

"Quite impossible," he agreed. "No woman—not even your Eve—would face the ghosts of the valley—I'll tell you all about that, some time. For the present, I'll tell you my idea of what we ought to do."

We had climbed, by way of an interior stair that we discovered in a deserted mansion, to the flat rock roof, and looking out, could see in all directions across the country.

"First of all, now that we can get an idea of the lie of the land from here, tell me what are the ways out," I asked. For I had an idea that he would have learned these, and heaven knows what else, from Ag and Ner, while I had been otherwise engaged with Eve.

He pointed across the country in the direction from which we had come. "Consider the kingdom as an oblong," he said, "for it is that, nearly, and so small as easily to escape notice until this part of the country is properly surveyed and mapped—which won't be for many years, unless news of that gold store-house gets out and spreads. That side we came from is hedged by the gorge, and the way of the trembling bridge is the only way of crossing—you can get down, away there to the left, but not up again. The further cliff is sheer, though lower than where we crossed, and that infernal hot river has run close to it and burrowed an overhang of the rock."

"So much for that," I said. "What about the north?"

"Impassable jungle, with tree-trunks feet deep in water, nearly all the length of the north side," he said, "and morass right up the rest of the way to where the country dries up and the hills begin—this volcano is a spur from the range. But there's hard rock this side the jungle, and a river that comes round from the back of the volcano as we're standing flows to that hard rock.

"The land on that side used to be the bed of a big lake occupying what is now the north of the country, but somebody, probably the people who planned this city, cut a sloping gully twenty feet wide in the rock to drain the lake, and the river goes down that gully like a millrace for nearly a mile, and then loses itself to form the morass.

"That gully of the river makes a second way out of the country, but nobody could ever come in by it. You get to morass, abandon your boat and take your chance. With your Eve, it's the only way out."

"This way?" I asked, pointing to the volcano, set in the third side of the oblong.

Watkins shook his head. "When you get over the river, waterless hills and valleys—like that valley we came down," he answered. "Nobody here knows, but I know from the map it drops to blank jungle—I can remember the conformation so far. You'd probably be dead of thirst before you reached that jungle."

"And south?" I took his word as to the impossibility of the way beyond the volcano.

"Hills and no water for about four days' journey, and what Ag calls poison-dart people swarm beyond—by the way, their villages run up to within a few miles of where we crossed the gorge. The desert stretch is wide enough to keep them out, and where they can't cross that sort of country we needn't attempt it."

I knew enough to refrain from questioning this, and in any case had no mind to venture into country where the natives used poisoned arrows, either with or without Eve.

"And now your plans," I said.

"Good old Faulkner!" Watkins exclaimed. "Still sticking to the terms of the bargain, in spite of your Eve. Well, I'm in no hurry to leave. It's no small thing to

plant a king on a throne, and now I mean to stay long enough to solder him down on it. He's a sort of relative of mine—it's for the good of the Watkins family."

I let that pass—he could account for his whims how he liked.

"I've discussed it with Ag, and he's grateful," he went on. "For the present we can only wait— things look quiet, but Ag agrees with me that that skunk Macer isn't coming in to kow-tow without putting up a fight of some sort. His people have been kings from the beginning of time, or longer, and he'll do his damnedest to be king too. I don't mean to let him."

"What are the chances of fighting?" I asked.

Watkins laughed. "There hasn't been a fight in the country since the legendary period," he said, "for there's been no cause. They're a peaceful people by instinct, and they haven't to defend themselves against invasion—the monkey woman and her guard do all that, and in a good fertile country a small population won't fight among themselves. These people simply don't know how to begin to fight."

"But these guards—they're armed," I suggested.

He made a gesture of derision. "Two hundred of them all told in the city," he said. "They can throw their spears and stab at close quarters—there's absolutely no other form of weapon surviving, unless you count the knives they use for their food, and as far as I can make out there are no paintings or carvings anywhere that would give the race an idea, except that heraldic device of the axe on Kirtas-Asen's tablet of gold. They face wild animals with nothing more than these spears, on the borders of the country."

"Let's go down," I said, for the afternoon was drawing on. We went down through the empty mansion into the street, and made our way back toward the palace.

"What force could Macer raise, at the utmost?" I asked as we went.

"With the men on the lands belonging to the king—if he can get their adherence —about eight hundred, altogether," Watkins answered, "but Ag doesn't know if he can find spears for all of them. And since it has never been tried, there's no telling whether they'd fight for toffee. I've told Ag to keep every smith in Kir-Asa working overtime forging spears."

"And shields?" I asked.

He swore beautifully at his own oversight. "Never thought of them," he confessed. "One for you, Faulkner. I'll get out a design and make 'em get busy on shields —it'll be one in the eye for Macer if he gets up and kicks."

"As he will," I prophesied.

"A few rifle bullets, and Ag is settled in his place, so long as one of the bullets gets Macer—his half-mad race is best exterminated, anyhow. A people like this can't afford degenerates, any more than it can afford wars."

"Isn't there collateral stock?" I asked.

Watkins shook his head. "Their record appears to have been one son for generations, till the last king broke all records for the country by having three. Macer is the only surviving claimant."

"And with any luck we'll settle his claim before we go," I said.

WHEN we were nearing the palace Watkins suddenly stopped in the street.

"Here, before we go in, Faulkner," he said, "I want to make you a wedding present. To-morrow you get your heart's desire, and I want, if possible, to give you the next three days clear with Eve, whatever we have to stand against later. I'll keep close touch with Ag and call on you if there's any need—I want you to feel that you need worry about nothing at all, for just as long as I can give you, and the three days sure. Ag is handing over his mansion to you, with a paltry forty servants to clean your boots and bring your shaving water—my gift is the three clear days."

I could not answer, save for a hand-grip that he understood. There was a kindly smile on his good, ugly face as we paused there. But a few weeks ago we had made a mere business bargain over coming on this venture; now, I knew, I had made a friend for life.

"Faulkner," he said, "I like your Eve. Three of us came as one, three will go as one—and I'll take the steering oar when we go down the rapids of the gully we haven't seen yet. For your three days, be as happy as if you were the first Eve's mate in the garden, and I'd wish you more if I could."

He set off again toward the palace without giving me a chance to thank him properly.

The six of us, Ag and his family, Watkins and I, spent that evening together in one of the lesser apartments of the palace, on the opposite side of the council hall to that in which Saya-Comin and his sons had lived. We were quietly content and sat till late. Niala was the first to go, and then Eve went with me beyond the door

of the room, where I took her in my arms.

"To let you go for the last time," I told her.

"Lord of my heart, I, too, wait," she whispered, and so fled away from me. Then I went back, and Ag told me the nature of the simple ceremony of the morrow. Thus that day ended, and Watkins and I were conducted to a room in the palace to which our rifles and all our belongings had been brought from Ag's house.

"You can take your own personal necessities and make 'em up in a bundle," Watkins told me. "I'll see that they're sent back for you, so you don't have to bother about that."

"I ought to include one of the rifles," I said.

"No," Watkins disagreed. "I'll take care of all the stuff till we join forces again for serious work. You've got your revolver as defence in sudden need, and it's enough. When you want a rifle, you'll want me there with another one, and I shall be there. Now do as you're told, like a good little boy."

* * *

Of what passed the next day I retain detached mind-pictures, but no connected series of events such as would form definite record. There is a picture of the great hall of the council, filled, now, with people—for it was the first day of their holiday, and all were free to come. I recall Ag's and Watkins' faces—but no other face was clear—as they waited by the carven throne, and a long clear lane from where they stood to the great portal, between the watching people. I recall Eve, coming through the great doorway and up that lane quite alone—coming as she had come the night Ag sent her to me, neither hurrying nor faltering, but with a gracious dignity that I have never seen excelled.

She wore over her richly embroidered linen robes a great mantle, of which the edges trailed on the ground. It was the finest woven tissue of pure gold, and was a legacy from the old race, for these people had not the art of such weaving nor that of drawing gold to such fine strands. She came straight to me, clasped her hands together and laid them in my own, and Ag's voice comes back to me as he said, "Now are these two one." And for me first, and then for Eve, remained to say, "Now are we two one." This said, the ceremony was ended.

A picture of a feast, at which we two sat side by side. Of speaking with the lords of the council and with others. Of Neray's face somewhere in the throng that eddied round us. Of Watkins, sober old Watkins, kissing Eve on the brow, speaking with her, and admiring that wonderful golden mantle, so fine as to be a transparency about her. Of her gay laughter with the mischievous note in it, as men and women came and went, and of Ag, grave and with some added dignity grown about him since we first stood with him in this council hall—he made a fitting king.

Of the throngs thinning, going. Of how at last we two left Ag, his wife and son, and Watkins, in the arching vastness of the palace entrance, and with a hundred guards about us went down the avenue, Eve leaning on my arm; of the setting sun striking a myriad gleams from her robe of gold.

Of passing in to the hall of the mansion while our guard stood at the salute. Of coming at last to a room that before this hour I had not entered, and there taking from my princess the shining golden robe, not brighter now than the light from her eyes. Of her unbound hair that made a curtain about her face. . . .

Thus, as she desired, she slipped into my arms to rest.

* * *

I had meant to tell of the three days, Watkins' gift to us, but the long minutes pass and no word comes. It is in my heart, that perfection of world-forgetting, but I find it not a thing that can be told. Here in this record I have kept back nothing, so far, and it is not by will that the tale of these days is withheld. It is that they were past all telling wonderful.

The fresh beauty of English woodland in early summer dawns; the perfection of the world's great love songs; the music that is in the long, slow roll of waves onto a quiet shore; the splendor of gold and flashing gems; the fragrance of old gardens, and the questing sweetness that is in the breath of the west wind come over harvest fields—like these, and more than these, was Eve to me. To put that perfect time into little words of mere description, to attempt picturing it by statement of what we said or where we passed it, would be banal and small, dust on the mirror of a time that was out of time. If we spoke, it was not that we needed speech, for we two were one.

This I set down in place of the record I would have made—set down with a touch of reverence for my princess, again hear-

ing her happy laughter of those unthinking perfect days.

The great stone table had been moved aside in the central hall, and a little table of carven hardwood—a recessed block like the stone table—had been set in place for us two, for Niala had thought for her daughter as Watkins had thought for me. Here we sat, having eaten, on the morning of the fourth day, and here Watkins, entering, found us.

"Well," he said cheerily, speaking in the native tongue that Eve might not feel out of it, "we have left you to each other for as long as might be. And you?"

"Value your wedding gift as one to keep in mind while we live," I answered.

Eve smiled her concurrence. "And now it is over?" she half asserted and half questioned.

Watkins hesitated, as if reluctant to end things for us.

"We know nothing of what is going on about us," I said. "So good has your gift been to us both."

"And now we need you, Jack," he said, "both the king and I. Neray fled to Macer on your wedding night. We hold the city, and how much of the country we hold we cannot tell. I hope to have more spies in when I return to the palace, and meanwhile the smiths are still forging spears."

"Eve," I said, "we will go back to the palace. I could have wished this time not so short."

"And I," she said with a little sigh, though she smiled at Watkins. "Yet if all life were such as these perfect days have been, how should we be content to stand beyond the stars?"

It was a brave saying. She looked back at the empty hall as we went out, and I saw her lips quivering.

"Beloved," I said, "we go as we shall return, together."

And at that she smiled again.

CHAPTER VI

CHALLENGE AND REPLY

WATKINS came with us to the council hall of the palace, in which Ag and the three lords of the provinces were gathered with certain administrative officials and minor dignitaries of the kingdom, who, following their master, adhered to Ag. I took Eve through to Niala in the royal apartments, and left her there, myself returning to the council hall.

I was in time to see a commotion down by the entrance, out of which emerged four of the uniformed spearmen and a woman who walked in their midst. The little group came up to the end of the council table, and, facing Ag on his throne, paused. I heard the three lords whisper among themselves as they stood grouped beside Ag, and looked from them to the woman, the cause of their whispering.

She was tall and slight, very fair-skinned for this race, and, like Eve's, her hair was brown, not black—they two were the only exceptions in this matter of the colour of their hair that I saw among the women—I believe they were the only two in the kingdom. This woman was no older than Eve, and had been no less beautiful, but there was stamped on her face the expression of one who has sold her birthright among her people and been cheated of the price. Her grey robe was greyer for the dust of travel; her eyes were heavy with weariness, but apart from that one need hardly look to see that the woman had wept all her tears, and now went dry-eyed in an eternity of despair.

"Your name and place, woman?" Ag asked—though he knew.

"My name, Eina. I come messenger from Macer, king, to the lords who were of the council of Saya-Comin, king, and who still hold to Ag, thief of Macer's throne. Macer will send no man to be slain, knowing that a woman may speak and go free."

She spoke indifferently, though the daring insult of the words was doubled by the hint that Ag was capable of violating the scanctity of a herald, had the herald been a man.

Days before, when we had talked with Ag, he had told us of this woman. She had been once a happy young wife to one of the head men of the king's lands; Macer had seen her and fallen in love with her, and she had left husband and child to become wife to him, the king's son. In this capacity everyone knew she had known suffering beyond belief and none of the honor that would normally have gone with this royal station. Her sin, furthermore, was one that no man nor woman in this land could forgive, and by its great rarity was more than ten times as conspicuous—a breach of their strict marital code: Ag looked his wrath at her bold words.

"On your knee, woman," he bade sternly; "deliver this message of a fled subject to your king and his."

The woman knelt without hesitation, as if it were all one to her how the message

was spoken. "Lords," she said, "I am but a voice, nothing more. Hear the words of the voice, then silence it if you will."

"Nay, Eina," said Ag more gently, "for I decree it as your punishment that you live and go free. From your face I read that I could speak no harsher sentence, no doom more terrible. Rise, being sentenced. Speak the words of Macer without fear."

She rose, but not so indifferently as she had knelt, for that sentence stung her beyond any harshness or threat of punishment. She spoke her message, as bidden:

"From Macer, king, to such of his subjects as hold to Ag, the thief, in forgetfulness of the law.

"I have gathered up the men of the king's lands and armed them for war, yet would I not war against my people, but only against Ag, son of Ner (the name, spoken in such form, was unforgiveable insult, conveying a slur on Ag's mother) to whom in their error they have given support. Thus, having gathered up my men, for the space of three days after this message is spoken I will hold my hand, that they may deliver up to me Ag and the people of Ag and the strangers who are with him, for my vengeance. Yet, having moved to the western border with my men, will I in that three days give the house of Ag to destruction by flame, as token of my power.

"If at the end of the three days Ag and his people and the strangers be not given up to me, with my men will I advance from the west. First will I lay waste the province Ag ruled, slaying every man and giving all the women into serfdom for eternity. And if still my subjects in Kir-Asa will not give up Ag, so will I deal with each province in turn, saving only the king's lands. So shall there be no harvest, and the people that are in Kir-Asa shall starve.

"And if, when all the land is laid waste, save only the lands of the king, when all its men are slain, if then Ag and his people and the strangers are not given up, then will I lead across the land the things of the waste, that its women may be destroyed and the kingdom, all but my people dwelling in the lands of the king, shall cease to be.

"But if Ag, and the people of Ag, and the strangers, be given up to me bound, there shall be pardon without question for all who in error have given support to Ag, and the land shall be at peace.

"Thus I, Macer, king, decree."

I could well understand that Eina, bearing such a message, looked for death at the end—though I did not then know the full terror embodied in Macer's decree. Yet I saw a look of definite fear on Ag's face when she spoke of the "things of the waste," though to me there was no especial threat in this part of a message that was all threat. It was spoken monotonously, with just sufficient emphasis and inflection to give every word its intended meaning, and no more, and, weary though the woman was, her voice was one of far more than normal sweetness.

"Woman," said Ag, "we have heard. Wait, and take back our answer when it is prepared."

Since the preparation was evident from the answer itself, there is no need to detail our conference. Ag, Watkins and I, and the three lords were chief framers, and we got a writer who inscribed four copies on thin wooden sheets covered with hard wax. Three of these copies Eina took with her, and one we kept; before she went, Ag also read the answer aloud, mainly to remove the effect of Macer's threats from the minds of those who had heard Eina speak. This was the answer:

"Ner-Ag, king, to such of his subjects as follow the unjudged fugitive from justice, Macer.

"For the space of ten days from the sending forth of this my message shall it be given to you to come to my royal council hall, and, laying down your arms, go free.

"I will make no war, I will slay no man, lay waste no home, and harm no woman, if this be done. But I will send forth my army under Philip my kinsman and Jack the son of Faulk with him, to destroy such as will not cease from following Macer, that my kingdom may remain unharmed from the western border to Kir-Asa, where I sit to rule. Such men as do not submit shall take the risk of their defiance, for my army shall come against them not only with spears, but with thunder and flame that blasts and slays as Saya-Comin's sons were slain in this my council hall. In battle is my army very terrible, but to such as surrender within the appointed time will I give peace.

"Though I would have judged and sentenced Macer rather in mercy than in strict justice, had he surrendered himself to be judged by the law, yet since he has threatened to invoke and lead the things of the waste against the women of my kingdom, he is beyond mercy. Him, when taken, will I cause to be bound living and unharmed to such a bier as is used for the

carrying of the royal dead. On the bier shall he be taken to the summit of Kir, the mountain of fire, and thence sent bound and living on the path of the bodies of the royal dead. And such of my subjects as are taken with him, after the ten days grace are ended, shall follow him, bound and living, into the flame. Only the woman, Eina, should she be taken with him, shall go unharmed and free.

"Thus I, Ner-Ag, king, decree."

THE woman heard, and spoke no word. Watkins handed her the light burden that she must take with her.

"I would ask," he said courteously, "that you be given food and drink here, and store to take with you on your journey. And I would ask, too, that of this message one writing shall be given to Neray, sometime governor of this city."

"To Neray will I give one," she answered. "Here will I neither eat nor drink, nor will I take any store, being Macer's wife and among Macer's enemies. Is it your will, lords, that I go?"

"Go, woman," Ag bade.

The guards stood back from beside her. She turned and went steadily the way she had come.

The decree allotted to us our places. Ag would remain at Kir-Asa, king of such subjects as remained loyal, while Watkins, generalissimo, took the four hundred or so of men who made up the total the city had raised—including the two hundred of the guard. The rest were volunteers—neither Ag nor Watkins had thought it wise to conscript, though there was a well-known law which gave power to the king to embody such of his subjects as he chose, and the ranks of the guards were filled by command. We relied more on the terror of firearms, coupled with the probable effect of Ag's proclamation in causing desertions from Macer's party, than on numbers of spearmen.

We were glad of enough men to make a show, and trusted that they would not run when confronted by superior numbers. To that end, in discussing the matter, we suggested mixing up the untrained men among the guards, though Watkins did not press the suggestion; the discipline of the guards, though slight, might have a steadying effect on the whole.

I went mainly because I doubled the firearm value of the force; for that reason—the moral effect of rifle and revolver fire, and of the shot gun, which we took as of value at close quarters—I had to go. We had a vague idea of training one of the chiefs of the guard to use Bent's revolver, but our supply of ammunition was too short, for one thing, and for another it would have spoilt our reputation for magic if we made him as potent as ourselves. This man, Tain by name, we reserved for another purpose.

We gave our men the day for preparation, so as to start on the following morning. It was too late, even if we set out at once, to prevent Macer from setting fire to Ag's homestead, and by starting on the morrow we should still be in the line of Macer's attack when he set out, at the end of his three days' grace, on his campaign for the destruction of the western province. There was the plan, beautiful in its simplicity; Watkins and I discussed it with Ag, with the chiefs of the administration, and with the three lords of the provinces whom Ag had held in Kir-Asa, so far.

We caused this plan to be blazoned throughout all Kir-Asa as our intention; we almost shouted it in the streets, and let the men of the guard proclaim it where they would, taking them all into our confidence, that they might know what they had to do. We might as well have sent messengers to Macer, explaining the details of our campaign and furnishing him with a time-table, so as to save his spies, of whom we felt certain there would be some in Kir-Asa, the trouble of telling him the news.

That night, while Kir-Asa slept, we two told Ag our real plan—in spite of his entire ignorance of military affairs, he had been a little puzzled over our lack of reticence, up to then. I bade farewell to Eve, who would stay under her father's protection until we should return, and went with Watkins to the quarters of the guard. The volunteers having no quarter allotted to them, slept at their homes, and were to muster before the palace in the morning.

In half an hour, or less, we had the sleepy, wondering, two hundred guards on parade in their blue uniforms, all save Tain, who would take his orders from Ag himself in the morning, and ten minutes after forming up our force we marched off from the open space before the palace, while Ag and Eve, standing in the shadows of the entrance, watched us go under the light of the young moon. Eve waved to me as we went, and I waved back at her. Not a man of our command, save for Watkins and myself, knew his destination.

"Nicely done," Watkins remarked to me

in a satisfied way. "With half an hour's rest on the way, we'll be at the edge of the king's lands by dawn. By noon the royal country house ought to be well ablaze, and by night-fall nearly every man of the royal retainers ought to be scampering back from Macer to surrender and save his home and skin. Macer won't have a rag left."

"We mustn't be too certain," I remarked. "He knows what will happen when he's caught, or will as soon as Eina gets back to him, and he may retain some men."

"If Tain gets our two hundred volunteers on the march in the morning according to plan," Watkins said, "they ought to arrive on the western border just when Macer's survivals are sickest over the desertions. And that, by my calculations, will leave Macer as the solitary gold-fish in the bowl."

We marched out of the city, turned to the left off the great road when we had got down the incline to where fertile lands began, and called to the head of our force two of its members who knew the route to the royal domain, bidding them precede the force by a few yards as guides.

Watkins and I dropped to the rear to see that no man fell out under any pretext, and for another two hours we tramped on steadily. We made our half-hour halt as arranged, marched on at its end, and again halted when the moon was just on setting, to wait for dawn. From the way our guides described the rest of the journey, another hour's march would bring us to what Macer regarded as his country house.

WE MARSHALLED our men into a stone-walled cattle-pen or enclosure, partly to keep them from being seen, and still more to asure ourselves against the possibility of desertions. Any man trying to get over the wall of the enclosure would show up against the sky, and the shotgun was loaded and ready as a hint to any second man who might think of following a possible first. We counted them into the pen, and found all present; once there, they stayed—our fears of desertion were groundless.

"And now we're settled down," Watkins said to me as we squatted in the entrance to the enclosure, "I want to explain to you the black deviltry of Macer's threat about the 'things of the waste'." You may have thought Ag's sentence on Macer himself a bit harsh, but after that threat it wasn't harsh enough."

"The 'things of the waste' are the beings we met in the valley," I suggested.

"Quite right," he agreed. "I don't know if you felt, when they came near us, a sense of evil—of absolute hatefulness. I know I did."

"So did I," I said, recalling the feeling quite clearly, though the rush of subsequent events had driven it from my mind until he spoke.

"They *are* evil," he averred emphatically; "too evil to blend even with the Piltdown and Neanderthal brute-man types to make for intellectual progression—they are the dregs of human forming in the beginning of time, the useless evil that was left. Half-human and half-spirit as they are, they form the nearest approach to the popular conception of devils one can admit as existing. Probably contact with them or something like them in very early historic times gave rise to the legends of demons and familiar spirits that have come down to us, and as they retreated to one or two waste places of the world, they have survived unseen."

"But if they can't 'blend,' as you put it, what can they do?" I asked.

"I'll tell you exactly what Ag told me," he answered. "There's no proof of it either way, for no woman has come in contact with them for centuries, though the surviving horror of them is so great that you mustn't speak of them before a woman. You saw that, with Niala and Eve."

"And couldn't understand it," I said.

"Neither could I, then. They can't harm a man, but any woman with whom they come in contact, and any girl as well, right down to babyhood, either loses her reason or dies. So Ag believes, and though I myself don't think this possible in any supernatural way, yet the effect of their hateful presence *might* be enough to rob any woman of her reason, or kill her by shock. And here's one reason why these people have never got out from their country toward the coast; the only way that they had is impassable to their women, and though the men might cross the gorge they couldn't take their families and belongings with them, even supposing they had the colonising instinct."

"But how could Macer lead these things?" I asked.

"In spite of their lack of intellect, a man can—again this according to Ag—place himself in sympathy with them, instil the one idea of easy prey into them, and then they'll follow him, even into

peopled country, so long as he's there to lead. And with every victim—that is, with every woman or girl they meet—they gain strength and confidence."

"It's too horrible to be true," I said.

"Possibly," he answered. "I maintain an open mind on the subject. Who would have believed that a woman could control and direct a horde of fierce apes—and yet we know that to be true. In any case, Macer would only seek communion with the things of the waste, and support from them, in utter desperation. It would be the sort of pawning his soul and burning the ticket in hell-fire that no man would contemplate while a ray of hope remained. Even when he hasn't a man beside him, still he'll hesitate."

"There's madness in his breed," I reminded him.

"Yes, but still . . ." he said, as if trying to convince himself. "Anyhow, we won't give him the chance. I had to get you to come with me to help to hold these men together to-night, but as soon as the royal residence ahead of us is well alight to-morrow—to-day, rather—you can take an escort of half-a-dozen men and get to the western border in time to stiffen up the volunteers with a little shooting. We should have Macer caught and on his way to the crater in about three days."

"I'd better shoot him, and save that horror," I said.

"Perhaps—and yet I don't know," Watkins answered reflectively. "The only horror about it is the anticipation, and Macer is too low a brute to feel that over-much—the actual death in the crater would be swift enough. And look at the moral effect. I spoke of soldering Ag on the throne, but carrying out a punishment like that would rivet him there."

"Supposing we catch our hare?" I suggested.

He laughed gently. "A reasonable idea," he agreed. "We are running past ourselves a bit. Look—there's dawn showing—in ten minutes we can begin to turn our men out."

THERE were things in the royal country house which made our work of destruction a tragedy, from the view-point of the archaeologist, but we knew it as a tragedy that had to be. Here, and nowhere else in the country, we found what we took to be traces of the race that came after the Atlantean founders of Kir-Asa, and before the present occupants of the land—the intermediate race of which we had been told as occupying before the people we knew came, perhaps to conquer, and in any case to replace them.

It is an interesting conjecture, that of how the first founders of Kir-Asa died out, how and whence the second race came, and then how this third nation or tribe ousted them in turn. How they came, whence they came, and the time of each occupation, must remain a matter for conjecture.

The royal house was built of blocks of stone, irregular in shape, and set in a whitish cement which in places had softened until one could pick it away with the fingernail. Within, we found that a partition between two of the rooms was of solid ivory, the sections being beautifully fitted to each other; one side was smooth polished, and the other carved. Then there was a room panelled with dark wood, with an inlay of severe geometrical pattern in lighter colour, and the massive rafters under the planking to which the thatch was fixed were carved with gargoylish faces in high relief.

We noted the contrast between this work and that in Ag's house, which showed the thatch laid on to bamboo rafters, without a plank lining to hide the reeds; bare thatch on bamboo was the invariable rule with the present inhabitants; here was evidence of another order of things. And the whole place was a riot of wood and ivory carving, including the circular wooden doors—similar to the stone discs at the entrance to Kir-Asa—which rolled back into recesses in the wall to give entry both to the main hall and to the chambers of the interior.

It seemed that the first Atlantean occupants of the country, workers in stone and metal, had devoted their attention mainly to things of practical utility; if they had gone in for carving and beautifying their belongings, the vast lapse of time since they died out as a race had destroyed all traces, just as it had destroyed the colouring of the glass in the one surviving window we saw. This second race—assuming that all this work was theirs—was more inclined to decorative arts, and to beautifying all they had inherited from their predecessors. So we saw it; the founders of the country were a great people, the second an artistic race, and this third order a mere occupancy, adding nothing, but merely using what they found.

But these reflections came later—we had neither time to consider these things nor tools to deal with them, if we had wished

to save evidences of the intermediate race, against which course there was a strong argument.

We could only admire, and regret the need that drove us to a destruction which would render us the last admirers. First the remaining ocupants of the place, mainly women and children, though a good number of men remained, were cleared out and rounded up under control of the guard so that they could see the fire. They, acting under our instructions, a detachment of our men made piles of combustible furniture in two of the rooms, and Watkins lighted one while I attended to the other.

It was the first time we had needed matches since our arrival, and as I struck a vesta on the sole of my boot, instead of indulging in the lengthy metal, stone and tinder process for producing fire, a big scared "O-oh!" went up from the few guards who watched my proceedings.

We held the previous occupants of the place watching, under guard, until the building was a roaring furnace, its roof fallen in and its walls cracking. And then we withdrew the guards and let the people go, in the knowledge that one or more would go straight to Macer's force with tidings of the destruction that was being wrought on this property, which he had reserved from the general doom with which he threatened the rest of the country.

Our men, unused as they were to this sort of work. obeyed orders implicitly, and I was glad to see that they evinced no inclination to loot or exceed their orders. They even worked actively in saving a group of reed huts from catching fire, keeping the huts nearest to the flaming palace damp by throwing water until all danger had passed.

I could grieve yet in recalling that burning of carven walls and rafters, hangings of cloth of gold and dainty furnishings, strange things of earthenware and wood adornment—the treasures of the centuries heaped in one great dwelling, to go up in smoke in a puny quarrel like this! Watkins had a thought of saving some of the smaller things; small and large alike were not merely priceless, for the word is feeble to describe them, unmatched as they were, and without like in all the world.

"If you take a rag or a scrap," I said, "how will you stop these guards if they show signs of wanting loot?"

"Quite right," he agreed. "As far as the guards are concerned, one shot would soon stop any looting, but if we are to make law we must be above breaking it."

So, reluctantly, we fired it all, and before it had burnt out—that is, well before noon—I set out with six men of the guard to link up with the volunteers from Kir-Asa near the western border and lead them against such men as Macer might have left. We had come some miles from the line of the great paved road, and the one of my men who best knew the way led us still further from the road at first, because of a river, swift-flowing and dangerous to swim, and too deep to ford, which flowed between us and the road. Having at last crossed this obstacle by a bridge farther down the stream, we were able to take a straight course across country for the western border.

We crossed this river on the second day, at a little after noon, and were then well into Ag's province of the west, not far from our journey's end. We had traveled swiftly, and I was nearly tired out. My rifle and the packets of ammunition.

For use with it had been carried in turns by my six men. I had the heavy revolver and its fifty rounds—or rather, the forty-nine remaining since I shot Macer—all the time. We carried each a ration of dried strips of meat that would last indefinitely, so as to be ready in case of emergency, but we lived on the country. It was necessary only to stop at any of the numerous groups of reed huts with which the land was dotted, and to ask; the people gave us all we needed.

As Ag had told us, there was enough food for all.

Down by the bridge by which we crossed the river, and on that river's far bank, a stone dwelling-house stood empty and without furnishings, though in perfect repair—as if its tenants had moved out yesterday, and new holders would come in on the morrow.

The country house itself was overshadowed by several kinds of palm; between it and the river, on a rich stretch of lawn, half a dozen flowering trees blazed, crimson and gold, and there were plantain and great glossy-leaved shrubs—it was a little Eden of a place.

Our guide, who came originally from this western province, told me the place was one of Ag's pleasure houses, furnished from his main residence when he chose to use it. Hence its perfect state of repair, and its present emptiness—it was long since Ag had been here, the guide said. Not since the last king's insanity called for the formation of the present council, he thought.

MY THOUGHT, as I lay down with a heap of fragrant dead leaves for a pillow, was that the place would make a perfect little retreat for Eve and me. I had it in mind to make another week or fortnight quite alone with her, when this business should be ended and before we left the country.

Before lying down, I took one of my men to a certain spot, and bade him observe one of the shorter of the palm trees. I explained carefully to him that, when the sun began to sink behind the palm as he stood on this spot, he must waken me. Then I lay down and almost instantly was dead asleep, for I was very weary.

The sun was high over that palm when I fell asleep. As it sank westward—and this I had overlooked in giving my man his instructions for wakening me—it described an arc in the sky, coming down to the side of the palm as one stood on the spot I had indicated to him. The bucolic fool, half through fear of wakening me when he ought not, and half through stupidity, waited for the sun to move across the sky and place itself over the top of the palm, apparently. In any case, it was halfway down the trunk of the tree, as one observed it from that particular spot where I had bidden the man stand, when I wakened of my own accord and sat up with a start in realising how much of the day had gone.

Well, swearing was no good, and one could hardly hope, after all, to carry such a venture as this through without some minor mishaps—inwardly I prayed that this might be only a minor one. I took the rifle and amunition myself, now, and we went on. Some way before us—perhaps three or four miles—opaque clouds of smoke blotted out the sunset, telling us that Macer had fired Ag's home, probably immediately on hearing of the burning we had carried out.

To either side of us, now, men fled eastward both singly and in scattered groups, the greater number being away on the side nearest to the great road. They steered wide of us as soon as they saw us approaching, and I judged them to be deserters from Macer's force, fleeing back toward their homes. At last, when we were nearing the burning house, and the sun was just touching the horizon, one came straight toward us. It was Tain, the chief of the guard whom we had left in Kir-Asa to lead the volunteers on their march, breathless, and carrying a spear. He knew us by the light, coming from behind him, falling on the blue uniforms of my six guardsmen. He did deep reverence before me, and stood silent, fearing to speak.

"Tell me what has passed, without fear," I bade.

"Lord," said Tain, "when it fell to these men to fight, every man save only myself hurled his second spear at a man of Macer's. Then were they all weaponless. Some fled and some were killed by Macer and his men."

He had never seen men fight to kill before, this Tain, and liked it little now that he had seen it. As to the spear-throwing, guards and volunteers alike had been armed with two spears to each man, one for throwing and one for close quarter work, while as many shields as could be made in time had been distributed among these same volunteers.

"How comes it about that you would not wait for me to join you?" I inquired.

"Lord," he answered, "I halted them and waited at a distance from where Macer had his men, and there watched eagerly for your coming to lead us. But Macer's spies told him of our coming, and he advanced against us. Then I had to bid my men fight, for being untrained they could not be trusted to retreat."

This I knew; try to get untrained men to retreat before a superior enemy, and the result is a mere helter-skelter flight.

"And then?" I asked.

"Then I ordered a charge, having warned them to keep each one spear, and to hurl none until they were close to their enemies. I knew they would not stand to be charged, so led them, and every man hurled his first spear too soon, and uselessly. Macer's men roared laughter at them, and charged to meet them. Then being frightened, they threw each his second spear for all that I could say, save for some few that fought bravely at the onset and were killed. The rest fled, some to escape and some to be caught and speared as they ran."

"And you too escaped," I commented. There seemed nothing else to be said over the sorry business—I could imagine the swift result of such a fight, if fight it could be called.

"Lord," said Tain, "I was but one. I stand to be slain by your magic or punished as you may desire."

He was one of those who had seen the shooting in the council hall, and his courage in thus surrendering himself—for he obviously expected death in consequence of the defeat—won my admiration. I laid my hand on his shoulder, and felt him

"Here, or beyond the stars, forever my love is yours!"

trembling—his will could not quite control his nerves.

"TAIN," I said, "if there be any fault, it is my own, for my absence lost our fight. When the tale of the folly of your men is laid before Ner-Ag, your king, there shall be told with it how one man, Tain, played a brave and skilful part. And for you there shall surely be some reward."

He stared as if unable to believe my words, and then would have dropped on one knee before me, but I stopped him.

"That only to Ner-Ag, the king," I said, "and there is work for us. First catch me one of these, all of you," and I pointed to the stray figures who still drifted past us to eastward.

They rounded up one with little difficulty. Tain disowned him as not coming from among the beaten volunteers, and the man confessed himself deserter from Macer.

"Tell all the truth of Macer's men and Macer," I bade, "and I set you free to yield to the king and gain pardon. But if it be not the truth—bid the guards catch me another, Tain—I will blast you dead."

Tain set five of the guards to round up another of the deserters, and when they brought him in his tale confirmed that of the first man. Eina had come from Kir-Asa, bearing some message over which Macer and Neray had quarrelled—Neray had been heard to threaten that he would go back and surrender himself, which had made the men of the king's lands uneasy. Partly to pacify them by loot, and partly to secure their allegiance by making them active participants in his revolt, Macer bade them sack Ag's house, and pay special attention to the wine-casks and vats. Many had got drunk, but they still had great stores of wine.

Then came messengers from the king's lands, telling how we had burnt the palace. Macer tried too late to stop this news from becoming generally known, and his force began to melt—I gathered from what these men told that he had fully a thousand men before the rot set in, this even after allowing from the over-estimate likely to be made by such as our informants.

Fully half of these had got themselves too drunk to move when the news of the volunteers' approach was brought in by spies, and at that news Macer fired Ag's house with his own hand—as Watkins and I had fired his, I thought—and got his men together to face the volunteers. He had still about two-thirds of his original force left.

The story of the fight we knew. But these men told us that Macer, himself none too sober, then, and judging his men firmly bound to him by their burning of Ag's house and the slaughter among the volunteers, had in his exuberance over the victory read out Ag's proclamation to his army, jeering at Ag, and promising reward to the man who could suggest the most painful form of death for him, when caught.

It was a false move. There were some among these men who saw that Ag's leniency and offer of unconditional pardon were available only for a few days more, after which they ran the risk of accompanying Macer down the crater of Kir. They expressed their preference for making terms with Ag, rather than adhering to this man, by desertions. It seemed to them, from Macer's reckless excesses, that he was careless whether he won or lost in the end. So it seemed to the two we caught, and so it must have seemed to many more, for, when these two deserted, Macer had hardly a quarter of his men left, and these had gone back to Ag's wine-casks.

Thus the story, identical from both sources, that we learned before we let the deserters go. What had chanced since their desertions, of course, we had yet to learn. There was more of a moon than on the preceding night, and we went on in the moonlight toward the glow that had been Ag's house, keeping ourselves in the shadows as much as possible to find how the position now stood.

WE HAD gone but a little way in the moonlight when I called a halt and gathered the six who had come with me, together with Tain, round me. Suddenly I had realised that, in place of the army of two hundred men to put against Macer, I had only these. In our plans Watkins and I, relying too much on the volunteers and —as it had proved—too much on the chance of desertions from Macer's force, had omitted to specify when we should unite our forces.

He trusted the west to me, while after the burning of the country palace he would hold the king's lands in case Macer should out-march me and my men. We had planned, as the real object of the little campaign, that with the volunteers I should drive Macer and any men who adhered to him on to Watkins with the guards—and now I had nothing left with which to drive.

This I explained fully, and sent back two, the one who had guided us and one other, to tell Watkins that there was no longer a volunteer force, and I had but five men left. As to shooting, with both rifle and revolver I had one hundred and thirty-nine rounds, forty-nine for the revolver and ninety for the rifle. If only two hundred men still stuck to Macer, and I never missed a man, still in the end my power of blasting with thunder would leave him with over fifty followers—against us six.

The two set off at once; Tain and I went on with the other four. We came out to the great road, and from it turned up the avenue to what had once been Ag's house. Where Watkins, Bent, and I had been met by the white-clad major-domo who first conducted us to Ag's presence, an indistinct heap that looked like fabrics of some sort lay half in the moonlight and half in the shadows cast by the trees. When we came nearer, we saw that it was a pile of bodies, gashed and battered about in sheer deviltry, and left as token of the way Macer chose to deal with those who opposed him and his followers.

There were men of Ag's establishment, women, and little children. There were heads crushed in by repeated blows, children's bodies hacked and disfigured, severed limbs tossed on the pile—there could not have been less than fifty lives represented in that awful heap, and I guessed at once why it was there for us to see.

Macer, alarmed at the continual desertions, had determined to bind to himself such men as he had left, by deeds that Ag would never forgive. Probably he had first maddened his followers with drink, and then had urged them on to slaughter, and worse than mere straight-forward killing, until they needed no more urging, but became as fiendish in intent as was Macer himself. Not even he would instigate so awful a deed as this purposelessly; by it he secured a bodyguard with which, given luck (this is viewing it from his standpoint) he might yet overawe the country. Its people were in the main unfitted even to defend themselves, owing to centuries of peace; perhaps after a very little experience of this sort of thing they would be only too glad to hand over Ag and his people and us as the price of cessation. Meanwhile such a terrible measure of action as this would put an end to desertions—so Macer must have seen it, I thought.

The sight of these hacked and dismembered bodies moved me to black fury; Tain actually wept with rage, and the four guardsmen were almost sick with horror at the sight. We moved on, past the still glowing embers of Ag's burnt-out mansion, and beyond it saw that more burning was being carried on a little over a mile away. Toward this we advanced, guided as much by the yells and laughter which came clearly borne on the still night air as by the flames.

Beyond the trees and shrubs surrounding Ag's house we came to open, cultivated land, and so saw what was afoot. Macer's men were capering like demons in the light thrown by burning huts, and I could guess the fate of the occupants of these huts—unless they were already fled or killed. By the term of his "decree," Macer was not due to begin laying waste the land until next morning, but already he and his men had far exceeded his original threats.

I had a mind to try the effect of rifle fire on the pillagers, in spite of being so short of ammunition. Thus we six went carefully, feeling fairly safe even in the clear moonlight, since the glare of the burning huts would render it unlikely that the men round them would see anything approaching. When we got too near for walking to be safe, we went forward on hands and knees so that the young corn hid us. At a distance of about a hundred and fifty yards I signed to my men to halt and lie down flat.

It may have been less than a hundred and fifty; it was as near as I dared approach, for there is a big difference between such an echoing roar as our revolver shots made in the council hall, and the thin, sharp crack of a rifle fired in the open. These pillaging fiends, half-drunk as they evidently were, might be very little scared, and might even charge toward the shooting—I was by no means sure of them. Thus, if they should charge, I wanted to be at such a distance as would enable me to pick off two or three of them, reserving a full magazine, as they came at us. This, I calculated, would scare them from closing, and then rifle magazine and the revolver would put them to flight and give me time to reload.

At the same time, it was an extreme range from which to fire. Even at close quarters, shooting by moonlight is risky work, and at this distance I knew it was most uncertain. I broke open a packet of ammunition and put the loose cartridges in my packet, took out the magazine of the rifle to assure myself it was fully charged

—I knew this already, but to get the best out of firearms one cannot be too careful—snapped the magazine back in place, and loaded the barrel from my pocket. Then, getting the rifle to my shoulder, I found the foresight—a more difficult matter in moonlight than one might think—and aimed at the nearer of two still figures standing in the light of the flames, with a hope that it might be Macer himself. The shrill, despairing shrieks of women broke out as I pressed the trigger—and saw that I had missed my aim.

MY MEN shrank at the crack of the rifle, but it produced no effect at all on the figures in the firelight. The noise they made may have led them to think, never having heard such a sound before, that it was a distant crash as the ruins of Ag's mansion collapsed yet farther. I jerked the rifle bolt open and back, flinging out the empty shell; I laid another cartridge on the magazine cut-off plate, anxious to get in another shot before the fiends in the firelight detected our presence—and the cartridge jammed in the chamber, the rifle bolt stuck, half-closed.

I tried to pull it open, to close it fully; I tapped it both with my hand and with the revolver butt. The light was too poor for me to risk extreme force on it, but all that I dared do, I did, and still it stuck. More screams of agony came from where the flame of the burning huts was dying down, and I could guess what was going forward there. I had a mind to make a charge with these five men, trusting to the revolver to carry us through.

"Lord," Tain whispered as he lay beside me, "let me go to fight them with my spear, while you send them death by thunder."

The recklessly brave proposal, inspired by the sounds we heard and the piled bodies we had seen, was futile as my own idea of charging—we could not hope to wipe out two hundred devils, heartened by the defeat of the volunteers and rendered careless by the drink with which Macer had plied them. We should but add our own deaths and that uselessly, to such as must ensue.

And yet something must be done, or Macer and his fellow demons would pursue their course of slaughter and destruction. Lacking Watkins, and knowing him to be not less than three days' march distant—including the time it would take for my messengers to reach him—I felt helpless.

I whispered to my men to retreat; we crawled back until I judged it safe for us to stand, and then walked on to the shelter of the trees surrounding the ruins of Ag's mansion. I was heartsick at leaving Macer and his men at their bloody work, and felt, too, that these men with me must now lose faith in the power of the strangers, since I could not longer blast offenders to death with thunder. Was I to wait here while Macer spoiled Ag's province, or go back to Watkins, leaving the spoilers at their work?

We came on food from the mansion, which Macer's men had pillaged and abandoned, heaps of it. We ate, out of sight of the pile of dead. By the time we had finished that meal I had come to a decision; we regained the great road in the moonlight—it was early, yet—and I turned to where a cleft in the western skyline marked the entrance to the valley by which Watkins, Bent and I had come to Kir-Asa, the defile leading to the place where ghosts chase women.

We marched on, and as we went I told Tain my plan, for I needed his authority, as an officer of the guard, to back my own. After a couple of hours of steady tramping we came to and climbed the escarpment beyond the canal, and a little farther on a woman stepped forward from the rock-shelter where we three had found food at the exit from the defile. She stood still with hand up-raised to warn us against advancing farther, and a couple of great apes ambled clumsily round her, at times resting on their forepaws to look up at her face as if they waited her commands.

She was very much like her predecessor, with a similar angry expression—it showed even in the moonlight, and gave me an odd sense of recognition of her, though I had never seen her before. This gift of controlling the apes ran only in the women of one group of families, sometimes one branch producing a woman capable of the task, and sometimes another.

"Stay," she bade threateningly. "Without the graven sign of the king you may not pass here."

"We would not pass," I said, "but seek to speak with you."

"Then stand, and say on," she bade, bending to caress one of her uncouth attendants.

"Tain, officer of the king's guard, will tell you what has chanced in the land," I said. "Then I will speak with you."

"Nantia," said Tain, "King Saya-Comin is dead, two of his sons are dead, and the

third, being mad, lays waste the lands of this western border, killing its people because Ner-Ag sits king in Kir-Asa."

"IS THIS truth?" the Nantia asked wonderingly—she was of a race that never so much as dreamed of war.

"The madmen have burned the house of Ner-Ag in the lands below," Tain said, "and before the ruins lie a heap of slain, men and children and women of Ner-Ag's people." He went into details over the contents of that heap.

"Then what would you—what seek you of me?" the Nantia asked when all the tale was told.

I took a step forward. "I, Jack, husband to Eve of the house of Ner-Ag, king, would command your aid," I said.

"Mine?" she asked incredulously. Then she took note of the title I had claimed, and since I was backed by an escort of the royal guards, she bowed before me.

"Yours, Nantia," I said. "You shall gather together your beasts and lead them down into Ner-Ag's lands, there to loose them that they may tear in pieces those who have slain old and young. This I lay on you as the decree of Ner-Ag, your king."

She bowed again, never thinking of questioning the royal authority, by which she held her place. "Now, or at dawn?" she asked.

"Now," I told her, "for even at this hour women are suffering and men being slain."

She turned toward the hills and sent forth a cry that went echoing up the defile. "Lords," she bade us, "come you close about me, lest my guardians of the way take you for my foes."

I, for one, was glad enough to comply with the request. The Nantia cried to the hills again, then looked closely at each of us in turn, stroked our faces and arms, and made little caressing noises, while her two constant attendants stalked round us, sometimes almost upright and sometimes on all fours, watching the performance closely. With time to observe the beasts at leisure, I saw that they were ordinary apes, probably orang-outang, but very large even for that breed.

Presently there came an uncanny rustling and movement all about us, and though these things had been evoked by my own wish I felt afraid as the great beasts, in response to the mistress' call, swarmed round, indistinct in the moonlight against the brown rock background. I wondered what would happen if by any chance the Nantia should lose control over them, and that still more when she asked:

"Lord, must it be? Even now they thieve from the fields until the people murmur against me, and if I myself lead them across the fields, then will they thieve still more."

"Yet must it be," I said, "or all the province will be laid waste, and there will be left neither crops nor people to murmur against theft."

"Then let us go," she said.

And, as we made to move, she called to her pack as a man might call his dogs. The monkeys lumbered on with us, chattering among themselves, getting in our way, running on ahead and turning back to see if their mistress were coming. Their half-human faces looked fierce and ugly in the moonlight, and I thought of Watkins' theory of evolution, and the "things of the waste" we had seen beyond the defile.

"Do you not fear—the valley beyond the pass?" I asked the woman.

She smiled. "With such a guard I fear nothing," she said. "Night and day they attend me—they wakened me at your coming—and except that a man might slay my guard and me by magic, as might chance anywhere in the land and did chance to the Nantia who was before me, I am safe as in the royal palace at Kir-Asa."

I wondered how she could accept such a fate as this solitary existence, but did not venture a question on it. Possibly the gift of control over the beasts bred liking for her uncanny task.

I LED her down by way of the great road to where all that was left of Ag's house still smouldered. By the heap of dead, at sight of which the Nantia cried aloud, the chattering of her monkeys grew to jabbering and spitting and angry growling as the smell of blood excited them.

They wanted to stay, to sniff and paw the dead bodies, and with that intent they crowded and pushed at each other round the grisly pile, so that their mistress had difficulty in persuading them away from it. This she did with shrill, angry cries, and even with kicks—strange it was to see the great brutes, any one of which could have torn her in pieces in an instant, cower away and whimper at her scolding.

Beyond the shrubs surrounding the house, in the open ground across which I had advanced when the rifle jammed, we came within a hundred yards of a figure

that turned away from us and ran yelling toward where we had seen the reed huts burning. I guessed this to be a sentry posted by Macer, or he may have been a man from among the rebels returning to Ag's house on the chance of more loot, or a last deserter before day should put desertion out of the question by leading to fresh excesses. Regarding this, there could be no certainty, either then or after.

A confusion of cries ensued as Macer's men, who had been sleeping on the scene of their last orgy of pillage and murder, wakened each other at the alarm. The moon was near on its setting now; it hung over the hills of the western border, lighting the figures of Macer's men and the terrible army of the Nantia, beside whom we six walked closely.

I felt little thrills of horror, but no pity —we had too lately passed by the heap of dead for that. I knew, too, that there would be captured women among Macer's men, but it was impossible to save them. There was no possibility of parley, I felt—Macer had put himself and his fellows beyond that. So I gave the word:

"Loose them to slay, Nantia, and to slay on while one remains alive."

She bowed her acquiescence. Her apes were already restless from the smell of blood and sight of the bodies in Ag's garden, and now she urged them on, pointing to where Macer's men huddled, too frightened either to defend themselves or flee. Her cries struck on my ears as almost familiar—they were exactly such cries as those with which her predecessor had set the beasts on us three, when we came out from the defile toward Kir-Asa.

Of what followed, I have no intention of telling. I sat upon the ground with my hands over my ears, trying to shut out the sounds of that—I would have said battle, but it was mere ruthless extermination. Then I remembered that before these people I must at any cost preserve the dignity my station demanded, and forced myself to stand and watch. Thus do I know by actual sight how the fiends in hell find diversion, and of what nature is the torment of damned souls.

"Call them off, Nantia," I said at last, for she stood silent in sheer horror, and I could see that her beasts had begun to quarrel over the worrying and tossing of dead bodies.

At that she roused herself and called the apes back to her. I feared, at first, lest they should fall on us, but they came fawning round their mistress at her cry, and she spoke commandingly to them, patting and stroking their bloody heads. They settled to comparative quiet, being content and sated with their work.

"If we six stay here while you return, is it safe for us?" I asked her.

"Fully safe," she answered. "They have seen you with me, and any that come near you will smell my touch on you. They are wiser than the lower brutes."

I thought, after what we had seen, that except for men turned evil there could be no lower brutes than these, but I did not voice the thought.

"Take them back, then," I bade. "And as for you, Nantia, it is for Ner-Ag, king, to reward you for your aid, when the tale of how your beasts saved the people of this province is laid before him."

"If I might ask," she said timidly, "I would have that more food be sent, that my beasts may not so much seek to thieve from the fields of the plain."

"This, too, shall be done," I promised. "Take them, and go."

They lumbered past us as she bade them follow her, jabbering, mouthing, sniffing, like the shapes of an evil dream. When the last of them had gone, I collapsed in a fit of violent sickness, and in that I was not alone.

CHAPTER VII

REWARDS

IF I FELT inclined to question my own right to order that awful vengeance on Macer's men, I had but to consider the possible alternatives. At the very least, three full days must elapse before Watkins could bring up the force of guards, and in that time Macer and his men might have destroyed nearly half this western province, possibly gaining strength as they went on—and I had five men and a jammed rifle with which to oppose them. And—for Macer's final overthrow was inevitable in any case—he and his men were doomed ultimately to go living into the fiery crater of Kir; I had prevented that, though, by a death not less terrible. So far as I could see, the aid on which I had seized was most economical of life and suffering, in the long run, and therefore mine had been the best course to adopt.

We six slept where the Nantia and her monkeys left us. The moon was dropping behind the western hills when the last of the beasts straggled past, hastening after their companions. After my sick-

ness I lay for a while, staring up at the sky in utter exhaustion. Then I must have rolled over on my side and slept, for the sun-rays wakened me, wet with dew and chilled by the drop in temperature that comes with dawn. I sat up to see my five companions still stretched out like dead men around me, utterly tired out.

The sun shining on Tain's face wakened him, and he sat up shivering. "Lord," he asked, "what shall we do now—return?"

"Not yet," I answered. "First, even before we eat, now that we have light to see we must go there"—I pointed to the scene of last night's horrors—"that we may take back sure tidings of Macer's end."

At that he roused the guardsmen, and we went to our grisly task. The guards turned over for me everybody that did not lie so as to admit of full inspection, and there were more than three hundred, including those of the captured women. Of the state in which we found them, the less said the better; I had to look closely at every one of them, and, in spite of disfigurements, I was certain at the end of the search that neither Macer, Neray nor Eina was among them.

Here was an ugly set-back. Had Macer more men with him than I had thought—was there another party of raiders, more dangerous than this by reason of the presence of its directing brains, still to be dealt with? However this might be, I knew our work was not yet ended, and thus, on the way back to the ruins of Ag's house to look for food, I stopped out in the open—so that we might have timely warning of any attack on us—and got the jammed cartridge out of my rifle.

It was little trouble, by daylight; a few taps with the revolver butt got the bolt open, and the cartridge dropped out; its metal casing was badly bulged, from what cause I could not tell—but I concluded my task by examining the rest of the cartridges carefully, and discarding one other that looked a trifle unsafe. Where Watkins had procured this ammunition I did not know, but possibly these were reloaded shells which had not all been gauged to assure their fitness for use.

With a sound rifle again, I felt more at ease. We went back to Ag's place, and there was food scattered about in plenty, though we had to drive the flies off it. In spite of what the last few hours had shown us, we were not squeamish over a few flies, and thus ate our fill, still reserving the dried meat rations we carried in case of emergency.

After the meal, while I sat cogitating—well to windward of the pile of dead—Tain came to me.

"Lord," he said, "I have found one—will you come and see?"

I went with him beyond a little thicket of shrubs, and there, almost hidden in the greenery, lay the corpse of Neray. All round him the turf was trampled and the branches of shrubs broken down, as if there had been a savage struggle, and on his throat were finger-marks. Macer, I guessed, had choked the life out of him to prevent his going back to surrender himself to Ag. But was this after or before we set the apes on his men? Had Macer and Neray been hidden here when we passed, and where now was Eina?

Bending down, I put a hand on Neray's breast, under his tunic—my men recoiled at the act, as if it were a fearful thing for me to do, though they themselves had turned over the corpses of Macer's men, and the bodies of women with them, for my inspection, without hesitation.

I did not know—do not yet know—how long it takes for a corpse to grow cold, but I could feel that this body which had once been Neray still retained some warmth.

From this I knew that no other force of raiders remained for us to deal with. Macer and Neray—and perhaps Eina with them—had either been separated from the main body when the Nantia bade her beasts attack, or else the three of them had fled in time. Here they had concealed themselves; here Macer and Neray had quarrelled—perhaps Neray had attempted to go to the blue-uniformed guards he saw with me in order to surrender himself—and Macer had strangled him after a fierce fight. I felt a sense of gratitude over our own escape; had he dared, Macer might have slaughtered the six of us while we slept in the open, exhausted and unguarded as we were.

And now, I judged, Macer alone was left. I recalled the ultimate threat of his proclamation. His deeds so far had shown that this was no mere threat without intent to act, and Neray, lying dead here, indicated where I must look for Macer. But first, I must report to Watkins. I sent three of the guards, since none of them seemed quite certain of the way back, and judged that where the memory of one might be at fault another would retain enough impression of the route to act as guide to his fellows.

"Go back to the main body of the guard," I bade, "claim audience with their

chief, having in your journey kept to the way by which we came. When you have got audience with Philip, kinsman to Ner-Ag, your king, tell him that no man follows Macer now, for all are destroyed. Then tell him that I follow on Macer's heels, since he alone is left alive, and that while he lives I will not cease from following, Tain being with me."

I made each man repeat the message to me in the hearing of his fellows, and sent them off. Watkins could use his own discretion—I knew enough of him to foretell that he would cross-question each one of these fellows until he had got out every detail of what we had seen and done, and thus the bare message was enough. Meanwhile both Watkins and the guards were three days distance from me as nearly as I could judge. They could come and join in the round-up—supposing that it was not all over by the time they arrived—if Watkins chose.

This I left to him and meanwhile, having regard to Macer's threat regarding the "things of the waste," I could not remain inactive. It would be the height of folly to sit down and wait till Watkins and the guards should come to hunt the fugitive down, or to hope that the ghosts—or whatever they might be—were harmless, and Macer thus incapable of working further evil in the land.

NOW, the three men being gone, I turned again toward the pass in the hills. From Ag's look of fear when he read out the proclamation Macer had sent to him, and from the dread which made these "things of the waste" a forbidden subject among the women of the country, I had not the slightest doubt that Macer would head straight for the place where ghosts chase women, thence—as he and all his people believed possible—to lead the dread beings to the destruction of the country's women. If I had questioned whether he would not even now stay his hand and turn back to surrender, there was the still warm corpse of Neray as answer to the question, with the deeply indented finger-marks on its throat.

With Tain and the one guardsman remaining as our attendant, I came to the Nantia's shelter some time before noon, and there stopped to eat with her. She had store of food enough for days to come, and thus in spite of the devastation of the country nearest to her I had no compunction in taking from her stock. While we ate, I explained to her our errand, and saw just such a look of fear as I remembered on Ag's face, when I spoke of Macer's threat and the probability of his having gone through to the valley beyond the defile in her absence.

She agreed that there was a probability of this having happened. "Because of my children"—for so she called them—"I returned slowly—I had to call them continually from thieving in the corn. The sun was high when we reached this place again."

The maize was just showing its tassels in the corn lands, and I could guess how the apes would break away to steal the green kernels and suck out the sweet sap from the growing grain. Outside the rock shelter the Nantia's two especial pets lazed in the warmth; one of them licked a spear wound, token of the part he had played in the night's adventure. They were indifferent to us whom the Nantia had stroked and caressed as friends.

It was my intention, after eating, to go on to the valley and trust to my rifle to end the work the monkeys had carried so far. I sat with Tain, eating, and the Nantia watched us.

"I have in mind to ask Ner-Ag, the king, to build you a sound dwelling of stone," I told her. "So shall you have a place to store your food apart, a place to sleep, and a place whence you may look out to guard the way of the pass. It would be better than this rough shelter."

Her eyes sparkled with pleased anticipation. "But why this for me, lord?" she asked.

"Because, when I spoke of rewarding you for your aid, you asked only food for the beasts," I answered. "It is fitting that you too receive according to the measure of your service."

In place of answering she stood and looked along the way we had come. Following her gaze, I saw one approaching swiftly, and when that one came nearer I recognised Eina, the woman who had brought Macer's proclamation to Kir-Asa. I stepped out to bar her from advancing—her presence was proof that I had guessed rightly: Macer had gone through the defile to the valley beyond.

"What seek you here, Eina?" I asked her.

She looked steadily at me, recognising me as having been in the council hall with Watkins when she brought her message to Ner-Ag. I had seen her as weary then, but now she looked ill with fatigue, and to the utter despair that had engraved

itself on her face since she made herself outcast for Macer's sake was added the last evil—fear.

"Him whom I serve," she answered, stonily calm. "I would save him from the sin that shall not be forgiven, and would die with him."

That wonder of the world, the unselfish love of a woman, has many forms of expression, and here was one that claimed my respect. The man, utterly forgetful of her welfare, went in intent to a sin past forgiveness in this world and that to come; the woman followed to serve and die with him, thinking of him only.

"It is too late," I told her, as gently as possible. "He is already in the valley."

"There, until night comes, he must wait," she said, "and in the hours of day I may win him from his purpose, that he may die with no more against him than is now. The things of the waste will not come to him by day until they have communed with him by night and grown hungry to follow his leading."

"What would you do?" I asked, wondering at her.

She gazed steadily at me, and her lip trembled until she answered. "For this man's sake," she said, "I put aside speech with my people, forsook my child, braved the doom that is my merit, to live when death would be a gift past price. This through my love for him, and where we love we seek to serve, and to guard from all evil. Evil through his madness has he wrought, and by reason of his working, evil has come on him, yet even now he is guiltless in deed of this his most evil intent. I would have you let me pass to him, that by my love I may prevail on him to turn away from the things of the waste.

"To prevail over him lest he do this last horror, I will lie to him, telling him that now all is past he may surrender himself and hope for pardon from Ner-Ag, or that with me he may flee beyond this land to safety. Thus, though it takes all the time between this present and the coming of night, I will plead with him, not that he may in truth win pardon or escape, but that, being doomed, he may die as the king's son, and not as worse than beast seeking the destruction of my sisters who have not sinned—as for him I have sinned."

"And when you have turned him from his purpose, what then?" I asked. Her strength of purpose and utter sincerity moved me to something like reverence, but I could not see the practical outcome.

"If I go on to the valley, and find him there," she answered, "then will I speak with him and win him to my way. When I have turned him to my will, then will I raise my hand, thus"—and she raised her right hand to full stretch above her head—"and then, if you advance to take him, and he kill me, so shall I escape the punishment of life laid on me by the decree of Ner-Ag.

"Or if it be your will that I should endure, then can you blast him with thunder so that he die suddenly as his brothers died, and thus shall there be end of these things."

I considered it. If she found Macer and brought him into my view, the rifle would do the rest at anything short of half a mile. I could go with her to the entrance to the valley, and if she were sincere in her desire to win Macer to repentance, an hour or less would be enough to prove the extent of her power over him. I had not one second's doubt of her sincerity; one look at her face was enough to tell her earnestness, and one thought of the nature of Macer's threat enough to convince regarding any woman's desire to turn him from his course.

"I will come with you, as will these my companions, to the valley entrance, and there wait your signal," I told her.

She bowed before me. "Lord," she said, for the first time using the title, "if it were given to me to speak with my people again, I would bid them do reverence to you for your mercy to my man and to me."

"If I can compass it, Eina," I said, "when all this is past I will try to find you a place from which you may speak with all, and find life not so much a burden to be feared." For I had a thought that with Eve's gentle sympathy and aid this might be done.

But Eina shook her head. "I have sown—I reap," she said, "and if I would kneel before you it is not that you may ease the reaping, but in thankfulness for the boon I sought. Now let me take food and drink to bear to the valley, and go while the sun is yet high."

THE Nantia, who had heard all, brought out food and a small jar of water, and set them down, retiring again within her shelter—she would not approach nor speak with Eina, I noted. For her part, Eina took up the victuals, and with us three following set out on her way after a sip at the contents of the jar.

I felt half inclined to bid her rest and eat here, but there was the Nantia's attitude toward her, which I being only a man could not hope to overcome, and there was, too, such eagerness on her part to set about her task that I felt certain she would have refused the delay.

We went with her up into the defile, and in passing the rock where the other Nantia had died I saw that all traces of the beasts we had shot had been cleared away. Toward the entrance to the valley we fell back, letting Eina go on alone. It struck me that she was past all earthly sense of fear, for no other woman of the country would have dared advance beyond the Nantia's shelter toward this valley, while she went on as if the things of the waste had no existence.

While we moved forward cautiously, taking cover behind successive rocks and judging our advance so as to keep ourselves hidden from anyone in the valley before us, she disappeared beyond the end of the pass. We crawled up carefully, keeping to the rock-strewn ground beside the trace of the great road, and so came to the last light rise beyond which the natural amphitheatre of the valley showed clearly.

Down by one of the flat rocks, barely three hundred yards distant, were Macer and Eina seated, and I could see that he was eating the food she had brought. Twice I saw him push her away from him roughly. He finished eating; the sound of her voice came to us as a faint murmur, and I saw her place her hand on his arm. Then like a wild beast he flung himself upon her, so they rolled struggling on the ground. I had my rifle loaded and ready, and raised my head with a shout at which he flung the woman aside and stood up, looking round, while Eina lay quite still. I fired, and saw the bullet splash on the rock behind, a yard wide of its mark.

He ran toward the hillside, and, firing as he ran, I missed again. With a fervent wish that Watkins, sure shot that he was, had been here, I took a long breath and waited with my finger on the trigger while Macer set about the ascent of the steep slope, which, steadying his pace, made him a surer target. Then again I either altogether missed him, or wounded him so slightly as not to arrest his progress, and with the next shot I brought him down. He flung up his arms, came over backward toward us, and rolled some way down the hillside. There his body hung limply, curved over a rock outcrop, with arms dangling lifelessly.

We ran to where Eina lay, and I knelt beside her, blaming myself for having let her go, while Tain stood and looked at her with tears streaming down his face. I could see that she was quite dead; the fiend she had tried to save from his last deviltry had broken her neck with his savage grip.

Death had been kind to her though. All the lines that her doom of continuing life had set on her face were gone, and gone, too, was the soiling mark of her sin. Her eyes, not wide and staring as is common in dead faces, but half-closed, seemed to tell that she rested at last, and her lips just parted in a smile of content. Had she seen this as her way of escape, when she begged me to let her take it?

"Tain," I said, "let us bear her hence—I will aid you two. It is not fitting that she should be left here."

He bowed his assent. "I myself will carry her, lord," he answered, "but what of that?" and he pointed to where Macer's body hung among the rocks of the hillside.

"There let it hang for the kites to peck, till the bones drop down to the valley," I answered.

Then, Tain carrying the body of Eina in his arms—she was thin and wasted, and no great weight—we went back in the knowledge that Macer's revolt was at an end.

Before we went down to the plain at the edge of the escarpment from which one may first view Kir-Asa on coming to this land, we dug a deep grave with the help of Nantia and such tools as she had, and placed Eina's body in it, for once ignoring the custom of the country in burning its dead.

There she lies, overlooking the land whose women she would have saved from the man for whose worthless love she wrecked her life.

SOME way along the great road, where we were able to find people who could spread the news of the end of Macer and his raiders and so prevent flight from the western province, we made a halt for the night. Already many had fled, but our news stopped the rest, and I had no doubt that, in a few days, the inhabitants would have settled again. In the morning, Tain found one of the rickshaw-like conveyances of the country, like those in which Ag had first taken us to Kir-Asa. He unearthed this and produced two men to pull it, and was waiting for me at dawn with

not a little pride in his achievement. He would have made a good campaigner, in many ways, this Tain.

"Where are the others?" I asked him.

"The others, lord?" he questioned, puzzled. "Two men can pull all the way."

"No, Tain, the other wheeled chairs," I said. "We three—you, this man of the guard, and I, shared such small perils as were while Macer lived. We three will go in equal fashion to Kir-Asa, whether it be on wheels or on our feet."

After that, I might have bidden Tain and our follower of the guard hang themselves, or anything else I liked—there was nothing in their power that they would not have done for me. Tain found—or stole, for I made no inquiries—two more rickshaws, and the rest of the journey was both easy and dignified.

It was not a great distance beyond Ag's mansion that we took to wheels, for the first day was far spent when we had buried Eina and bidden the Nantia goodbye. Anxious as I was to get back to Eve, I was both physically and mentally exhausted.

For weeks, now, I had been subjected to alternations of every sort of emotion, all on high notes, and now I desired nothing but to get back to my princess and with her to rest, leaving Watkins to plan our time and way of leaving the country, if he chose. For myself I could plan no more, as yet—I refused even to think of the future and all that lay between us and a safe return to the lands of our own people.

In that sort of mood, at sunset, I bade our men turn off from the road, realising that it was useless to hope to reach Kir-Asa that night. I directed them toward a building of grey stone to the right of the road, and an old man standing by the entrance to the building watched us three descend from our conveyances.

"We seek food and rest for the night," I said to him. "If you need explanation of why we travel, this officer of the guard will give it—after we have rested awhile."

It was not a very gracious way of requesting a night's lodging, but the old man bade us come within quite courteously, neither asking our names nor offering to tell his own—he seemed quite incurious about us. I noted that Tain looked a little uncomfortable, and, when our host had left the room to which he conducted us, questioned the cause.

"This man was Eina's father," he answered. "I would have told you, had I known your intent to come here."

"It was not intent, but mere chance," I said, "for this place looked easy of access and fit to shelter us well. We must tell him of her end, though."

Then this Tain won my warmest approval. Knowing that I was very tired, he went himself to the old man and told the story of Eina's death and of her attempt to save Macer from the last evil he wrought. Presently the old man came to me.

"Lord, rest in my house in peace," he said, "and let me count it some little return for that which, in service to my daughter, you have done for me." And he went out to mourn over her end as he had been forced to grieve over her life, so that we did not see him again. There were two serving-men, as old as their master, who attended to our needs.

Retiring early to the room allotted to me, I wakened early; the dim light of the single lamp that had been given me at night gave little chance of observing my room closely, nor had I much thought, then, for more than the bed I saw waiting. But, in the morning, I saw that the wall of the room facing the curtained aperture—and that unusually small—which served as window, was curiously decorated.

A second glance showed me that the decoration was English script, cut in the stone as had been the writing in the cave, and by the same hand. Here, however, "Iohn Watkyns" had had more time; whether he had cut this record here as direction to any who might follow, or whether he had done it merely to pass a weary time, I do not know. Probably the latter, though.

The script was small; there was much detailed description of the habits of the people—which had not changed, apparently, between that time and now—and also much concerning the fauna of the country, including a "curious ratt" which we had not observed. Also John had noted that "they have many mungeese" (a word which at last I identified with "mongoose," an animal with which service in the East India Company would have made John familiar) "by which the land is kept purged of serpents."

There was a remark on the wonders of K'r-Asa, but no mention of its stores of metal; I concluded that the old adventurer had not seen the gold in the store-house we had visited, or he would hardly have let that pass without remark. On the other hand he mentioned that "these people have much emeryids, which they string for

necklaces, but oft break in the boring. They are great stones of much value." Eve's necklace, which she regarded as of little account, suddenly went up in my estimation.

He spoke of the language, this dead pioneer, "which for a Watkyns is easy of learning, since it is much like the heathen dialects which through service with the Company (the East India Company) I acquired, as do most of the men of my name and family." Then came a line that spoke of despair: "Because of the drunkenness of Van den Heuvel, and his violence when he is in liquor, have I been imprisoned here these three months, and we all kept separate. Mut I endure to look on these walls till death do bring release?"

Beneath this a wavering mark was scratched on the stone, as if the author of these reflections would indicate a break in the time of his inscribing. After that in fainter, lighter marking, came the story of "Iohn Watkyns, gent.," as he subscribed his name to this strange diary.

"It is more than a year that I last wrote upon this wall, and how many mighty marvels have been since that time. There was the erupting of this volcano, and the death of the man they called king, after his madness when he broak from restraint and ran about the city, none daring to lay hands on him since he was the king, and yet they made a great to-do when he broak his neck and so died.

"Likewise I was wedded after their fashion (for being heathen and knowing nothing of the true Godd they do not marry as do Xtain people, but most hastily and without propper ceremonies, yet are their women most vertuous) to a most tender and beautiful lady, for whose sake I had no mind to leave this land, but to stay with its people and see if by any fashion I might improve them, sending messengers to my brother Philip.

"But now is my wife dedd of bearing me a child, the which I have left with her father to care for, and so go, not caring greatly if the gulph and the trembling bridge do make an end of me. And most strange it is to be in this place where I was kept prisoner for near on the half of a year, and to feel that with my companions (all save Peter Sluys, who was bit by a serpent) I may go hence in peace and honour."

MY ORDINARY note-book had long since gone to pulp in the spray of the trembling bridge, but I still had a flat waterproof wallet, with about a score of sheets of thin notepaper. One of these had on it the message inscribed in the cave, and another the decree of Kirtas-Asen as Eve had read it out for me to put down, and now on a third I put such of the story of John Watkins as I have set here, for my Watkins to see.

Probably he would wish to transcribe the whole before we left the country, and to inquire if his ancestor had left other marks to attest his presence. As for me, I thought of Eve waiting at Kir-Asa, and had it not been too early to turn out our drivers—or rather pullers—with the conveyances, I would not have stayed to take down so much.

But the last sentence of the writing made me curious. If all this were true, if "Iohn Watkyns" and his companions had won "peace and honour" in the country, and left it freely as this writing implied, how came it about that they had to fight with the monkey guard in the pass, where two of them were killed? It occurred to me to ask Tain, as we ate before setting on our way, if any of the story of these men had been handed down in the country, and if he knew of the writing on the wall of the room, which I showed him.

"Of these scratches on the stone I did not know," he told me, "nor would any man have said that such marks could tell a story, for they are not like our own writing, lord. But of the men who came out of the west generations since, as you came, there is a story which my father had from his father, and so from their day."

"Tell me that story, Tain," I bade.

"Their leader married a lady of the house of Ner-Ag, who before had been married with a man of our race, but he died leaving her without children. Then in turn she died, having borne a child to the stranger from the west, and he and his men set out to leave the country.

"Here in this house for a time he lay sick, and the man who then lived here, by whom these men from the west had been guarded as prisoners when they first came, gave place to him and his companions until he should be ready to go on his way. Then one of the men, who was not sick, looked with eyes of love on the woman of this house, wife to him who gave them all a place here, and she became wife to the companion of Watkins. After these men had gone was a daughter born to her. Of the stock of that daughter was the old man with whom we spoke last night, and of that stock also was Eina, whom we

buried on the hill. The men from the west were bidden give up for punishment that one who had thus taken away the wife of the man who sheltered him, but they would not, and so fled. It is known that the culprit and the one other were torn in pieces by the guard kept by the Nantia of that day, and the others fled to the desert lands beyond."

The brief, tragic story, thus simply told, accounted for Eina's brown hair.

We left the house without seeing our host again, and before noon our rickshaw men had pulled us up the incline and through the great gateway of Kir-Asa, then on to the palace. And with Tain and our one attendant man of the guards—whose name, I had been somewhat amused to learn, was Bar-Ug—through the council hall until we three stood before Ner-Ag, king. In accordance with his decree, he sat to administer justice in the second quarter of the day before noon; he did not so much as move a muscle of his face as we three, unshaven and with the dirt that the chase after Macer had left us still on our clothes—ranged before him.

He had had no word of our coming; I had sent no message on before me, nor any further message to Watkins, whose present whereabouts I did not know. Regarding this last, I trusted Watkins to learn all he needed without difficulty as soon as he came near the border of the western province, which with his force of guards he would have reached before now.

"O king," I said, "Macer and the men who were with him are dead. When such men as came to supplement the guards had played the fool and fled, I called on the Nantia to aid us with her apes. She led them at my bidding, and now there is nothing left to trouble the peace of the land."

Ag considered it before he replied. He saw us as three tired men, and, knowing the main fact, did not ask for full details then.

"It is well, Jack, son of Faulk," he replied gravely. "Now may you and those with you go to your own places. Over this matter, now it is ended, there shall be no punishments, but I may decree certain rewards when Philip my kinsman has come to me. Of that in its time and in its place."

Thus spoke Ner-Ag, and as he spoke I saw him every inch a king. Not the limited, ineffectual representative of monarchy that we find in the present, but a being of a more generous age and time, a more complete and wise ruler, and a more just interpretation of the word which signifies him who knows, and who knowing is able to safeguard the interests of his people. Ag, as he sat there, was a great man and just; the country had no reason to regret the dissolution of the council of five and the passing of the old order.

I took little time, though, to consider him then. I passed on at his bidding, not staying to note what became of Tain or of our man Bar-Ug. In one of the state apartments I came on Niala, who put a finger on her lip to enjoin my silence and motioned me to a certain doorway, smiling her welcome at me as she pointed. Again I passed on, this time to the journey's ultimate end.

For there, where Niala had motioned me to enter, was waiting my princess with the shining eyes. Niala told me, after, that for all the time of my absence Eve had waited abstractedly, as if the half of her had been taken. I know that as her arms closed round me I counted all other things trivial, and of little account—I had lived, since I left her, only for the minute when I might forget the world in the ecstasy of this return.

WE WENT, next day, to the mansion that had been Ag's home, and that he had set apart for our use. First, though, Ag had all the story of Macer's overthrow and his end, hearing the details as much from Eve as from me, so far as I had told her the story. He talked it all out with me as we sat, the first evening after my return, a family party, and wished Watkins could have been with us. He spoke no word of his opinion on the matter; he showed no sign of approval for the way in which Watkins and I had carried the business through, but merely questioned, until I knew no more than he of what we had seen and done since we marched out with the guards from Kir-Asa.

And next day, as I have said, Eve and I went back to the world apart that was our right, the separateness from outside interests that had made our three days so wonderful—only to find that it was not to endure even for three hours, now. For Watkins, having brought back the guards, looked in on us late in the afternoon, stayed to eat with us, and then stayed on. Neither Eve nor I regretted his presence, though I think either of us would have resented any other intrusion on us just then.

It was Eve, in fact, who told Watkins that he must not go back to the palace till the morning, and bade a messenger

go to Ag and say that our guest would sleep here at the mansion. There was something tonic about Watkins, something that braced and cheered us both, although the language of the country—we talked in it since Eve was with us—gave little or no opportunity for his comments on men and things which in English were as illuminating as they were—usually—cynical.

It was growing late when Eve slipped away and left Watkins and me together. I had not mentioned the story of old "Iohn" in her presence, since it was in a way linked up with Tain's story of Eina and her people, and Eve guessed that I wished to tell this part of the story when I had Watkins to myself, away from her. So she bent to kiss me as might a wife of years' standing, and left us together, from the doorway giving back a smile that bade me not stay too long. Watkins looked after her thoughtfully, and sat down again when she had gone.

"You've won, Faulkner," he said. "I congratulate you without reserve now."

"For the first time?" I asked.

He nodded. "I wasn't sure, before," he answered, "but now I know she'll hold through with you and fit everywhere. You're a very lucky man—be good to her."

"Hardly a necessary caution, as yet," I told him. "But I've found something that will interest you."

The story of old "Iohn" more than interested him; he roared with laughter over his ancestor's idea of improving the race.

"The smug old hypocrite!" he exclaimed. "Just as in these days any European industrialist who found the country would introduce the tape machine and motors, and cash and cheap newspapers. Faulkner, there's nothing left on earth like this little country, and to try and improve it, that way, would be to spoil it."

"It might be improved some ways," I argued.

"Leave it alone," he said, with the satiric set of his face that I knew betokened seriousness. "It's a simple people living in plenty and happiness, without the unrest that follows on civilisation—none of the cash and discount system, none of the frauds and lying that make up what we call business, and where in the world will you find men as clean-thinking, or women as fine? Civilisation could give these people nothing comparable with what it would take away."

"Perhaps not," I said doubtfully. "I was thinking more of what civilisation could gain and learn from the country. The tremendous magnificence of Kir-Asa, the uselessness of gold—there's enough in that store to bring it down to a quarter of what its value is now. . . ."

"Leave Thomas Cook's patrons to gape at the Pyramids and drop their cigarette ends over Niagara," he interrupted. "Faulkner, can't you *hear* a crowd of gaping tourists saying, 'Gee, some ape!' at sight of that wonderful monkey guard, and a trade unionist shrieking, 'Long live the freedom of the proletariat!' from in front of Kirtas-Asen's monolith? As for the gold, can't you imagine the little syndicate of international financiers controlling it, doling it out so as to keep up the price and fatten themselves—and the double headline in the morning rag at the suburban breakfast-table, screaming, 'WORLD'S LAST SECRET UNVEILED. CREATION NO LONGER A MYSTERY. BY OUR SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE'?"

"That's the worse side," I argued weakly.

"Worse?" he echoed. "There'd be worse than that, Faulkner. Here's a contented people under a good king, safe for years from the fret of a world gone mad with mechanical devices for crowding lives and spoiling nerves. While they are safe, for heaven's sake keep out civilisation and the wreckage it would make. Let this little Eden remain without its snake, no matter what that snake might bring, or else the next generation of these women to this of your Eve will be turning the place where ghosts chase women into a golf course, and yelling 'Fore!' at the Nantia."

"Maybe," I said. That last argument won me.

"Not maybe, but certainly," he urged earnestly. "Faulkner, we may forget it if I don't say it now, or some chance word may slip, if we don't make it a firm resolve—let's promise each other that no word from either of us two shall ever give this place over to the financier and the tourist, and drag its people down from their simplicity to the insane complex we call civilisation. I feel strongly on it, and so will you, when you've thought it over."

"I promise, without thinking any more," I agreed.

"And I promise," he said. "Now run off to your Eve, and we'll talk to-morrow."

I needed no second bidding, although the story of Eina that Tain had told me was not yet passed on to him. I left him and went to where Eve waited my coming.

* * *

Now Ner-Ag, king, sat on the throne of

carven stone before the council table, and the great hall was full, for all who could come had been bidden attend. The three lords of the provinces had been called in immediately after my return, and though this was but the day following that on which Watkins marched in at the head of the guards, the throng in the council hall was representative of the whole country.

"Lords and people of my land," Ner-Ag said, "I have called you to hear the last words that are to be said in this matter of the flight and deeds and fall of Macer, which things are known to you. If any one among you has cause to speak against that which has been done, let him speak freely and without fear, knowing that I will listen and reply justly."

He waited, but no voice answered him. Then in the simple yet stately phrasing to which his language lends itself, he spoke his will:

"Lords and my people, all the land is at peace, and these sad things are ended. Therefore I, Ner-Ag, king, decree:

"For those who adhered to Macer there shall be no punishment other than that which has been dealt out to them before this day. Such men as remain alive shall go each to his own place, to live justly under my rule and law. And for those who served me there shall be rewards.

"For the beasts that guard the pass, such stores of food as the Nantia may ask, given freely and without stint, and for the Nantia there shall be raised a house of stone in her place where now is her shelter. There shall be a room where she may store her food, a room in which she may eat, a room for her to sleep, and a place whence she may keep guard over the pass.

"Tain, officer of my guard, shall be governor of this city Kir-Asa in place of Neray who fled to Macer and died by Macer's hand. This reward for the man who in defeat was courageous, and in pursuit loyal and worthy of trust, my servant and my friend, and the place of governor shall be his and for his son, from generation to generation, while they hold to the law and deal justly with the people of this my city. And Bar-Ug, man of my guard, shall be officer in Tain's place, for he too served loyally.

"And Philip my kinsman, and Jack son of Faulk to whom the hand of my daughter Eve is given, shall no longer be called strangers in this my land, but from this day they shall be called the king's friends, joint lords of the western province. It shall be told throughout all the land that these two, the king's friends, are free to command the service of every man and every woman, so long as their commands be just and in keeping with the law, and they shall stand before the lords of the provinces, since their hands held the places of these lords, and my place, in the time of need.

"If they go to their own land, then shall my province of the west be held in trust for them, and it shall no more be called the province of the west, but the province of the king's friends. Thus shall all men know how I, Ner-Ag, king, hold all who serve, and by their service prove their fitness to rule.

"Thus I, Ner-Ag, king, decree."

* * *

We gathered, that evening, in the state apartments, Ag and his family, Watkins,

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Eve and I. Watkins spoke of old John's message, and expressed his intention of going to read the script before we made final preparations for leaving the country. Then he recalled the mention John had made of "emerylds."

"If I might just have a look at that necklace Eve is wearing, old chap?" he said to me.

I explained the request, and Eve took off the necklace, and handed it to him with a smile.

He examined it closely.

"Have you many of these bits of green glass?" he asked Ag.

"Some few stone jars of them, yet," Ag said. "The women of the land like them strung as necklaces, and though many have been broken in the boring, many yet remain. I will bid that a jar of them, or two jars, be given you, if you will."

"In my land," Watkins told him, "this necklace would buy your place."

Ag smiled indifferently. "There must be many fools in your land, kinsman Philip," he said.

"There are!" Watkins agreed, with surprising heartiness. "Still, we will accept your gift of that jar, when we go."

"When shall we set out?" Eve asked.

Neither then nor at any other time did she show hesitation over going. When I questioned her about leaving her family and country, always she answered simply that she had given herself to me.

Then I told her of the little Eden place down by the river bridge, that I had found when we went out after Macer. She remembered it, having been there in her childhood with Ag and Niala.

"Before we set out on this long and perhaps dangerous journey," I said, "I want some days of rest with my princess, without the need for thought of any kind."

"Sound wisdom—we must be quite fit before we start," Watkins agreed, while Eve smiled her pleasure at the thought of our little holiday. "And you're looking fagged and played out, Jack. A quiet week or so with Eve, while I hunt round for traces of my forefather, will make a new man of you."

Then he smiled at his own inconsiderate lapse to English, and translated the sense of his words for those who could not understand them.

"I will command to-morrow," Ag said, "so that all necessary furnishings are sent to the place. It was the place of my happiest days with Niala, and you two may go when you will, to find my servants waiting there to receive you with all things prepared."

I thanked him as best I could, but he made a gesture as if to put thanks aside.

"When I bade you value my gift, my Eve that is now your Eve," he said, "you bade me judge how you would value that gift, if need arose for you to render service. The need arose, and passed, and now I know that neither to you nor to Philip can I ever repay in full. Yet—we be three kings together, let us say among ourselves, and it is sad for me to think that soon I shall be king alone."

* * *

Watkins walked down with Eve and me to our house in the city, there to leave us.

"It was a good idea of yours, that of finishing the honeymoon out of the way of callers," he told me, "and seriously, too, I think you need the rest before we start."

"I'm certain of it," I said.

"Well," he advised, "take it as you took the three days I gave you. Leave everything to me for the time, and when you two come back we will consider when and how to leave—and how to pack the emeralds. Eve's dowry will be something to make millionaires tremble, if we don't spoil the market by selling too many emeralds at once."

"We'll form a little syndicate," I said, "like that one for controlling the gold output from Kir-Asa when the country gets civilised. We'll unload so as to keep up the price."

"Eve," Watkins said, "when you get that man of yours to yourself, twist his ear till he howls for mercy. It will be just punishment for him."

But Eve smiled, and slipped her arm through mine as Watkins left us.

"Shall I not be good to my own?" she asked caressingly, "since ever my own is good to me?"

CHAPTER VIII

PERHAPS——

"NO," WATKINS said emphatically, "you won't take a rifle. You can have your revolver—hang it all, man, you're going for a rest with your wife, not going to war. Don't be a hog."

"I had a mind to get Eve used to the noise of a gun," I remarked. "We shall have to do some shooting when we leave, and she may as well get to know what it's like."

Bending over her was something of which the outline was hazy and almost transparent.

"Quite sound and practical," he agreed. "Take an extra twenty rounds out of the fifty Bent carried for his pistol, and blaze away at the butterflies till you're thirsty. But there's no need to make a Christmas tree of yourself with rifle and ammunition as well—you'll want the revolver as a sort of precautionary measure, in any case."

As usual, I gave in. It was the morning of my setting out with Eve, and we had planned for eight clear days, exclusive of the two we meant to take on the journey there and one for return. The arrangement was to be considered elastic; we could stay longer or return sooner, just as we wished.

"Now we're on our own, Watkins," I said. "I want to tell you the story of the place you're going to see."

Then I told him all that Tain had related to me of Eina's story.

He nodded thoughtfully. "Thanks," he said. "It would have been a bit awkward if I had butted in on the old man without knowing—he'd think it rather heartless of me to intrude on his grief, perhaps, without some word of sympathy. I'm glad you told me."

"And now," I said, "if I don't hurry, Eve will be wondering as well as waiting for me."

"I'd hate to have that happen," he answered rather ironically. "Come and let's get the good-byes over."

In spite of his inevitable irony, we had a sense of this as a memorable parting. It was the last time and Ag, Niala, and Ner, her brother, would bid good-bye to Eve as one of themselves. When we came back, it would be for an unquiet day or two before we set out to leave them for life, in all probability, and I think they saw this parting in the light of what the next would mean. In any case, before we went from the state apartments to pass through the council hall, Ag put his arm round Eve and laid his hand on her head,

"Daughter, mine no longer," he said, "I am glad in your happiness, glad you have found a man worth your love—but it will be hard to let you go from me."

"Hard for me, my father," she answered, "yet am I his, following gladly where he may lead, to make his life mine and his people mine. For my own happiness I must give all, and giving is easy where we love as I love."

Then Ag kissed her and let her go, and Niala, with tears in her eyes, kissed her good-bye. She kissed me too, for the first time, and then with a handgrip for Watkins, Ag and Ner, I got in the rickshaw that waited for me. I looked back and saw the four of them in the palace entrance, clear against the morning light that came through Kir-Asa's one priceless window behind them, and was surprised to find myself a little choky with emotion.

"Yet once more shall we see them stand thus, the three, when Philip goes with us," I said.

Eve smiled. "For this present, let us think more of the days to which we go," she answered.

Now happiness breeds no history, as I know, and that journey, with days we spent in the house by the river, made greater happiness, even, than the three days that had been Watkins' wedding gift to us. If I dwell on the trivialities of this time unduly, it is because they were immeasurably precious, jewels that I turn over, miserlike, and reluctant to lay them aside.

We went down the long incline from Kir-Asa, away from the straight, unwavering smoke column that went up to the sky from the volcano behind the city, leaning eastward as it rose in the slight western breeze—a faint breath, rather than a breeze, laden with the fragrance of mown grass and of the corn lands. I thought of the thousands—millions—who must have trodden this great road since the days of Kirtas-Asen and his pride, and of the mysterious second race that had risen and passed, leaving no trace beyond what we found and burned in the country palace of the kings.

Had there really been a second race I wondered, or had the progenitors of this present people followed immediately on the Atlantean colony, and were the wood and ivory carvings a token of their achievements before in content and in dwindling to weakness they suffered the arts to decay and be lost? To that questioning the long centuries hold the answer.

Down to the fertile lands, where the maize tassels shone in the fields, and the water wheels turned, as since Babylon grew and before Nineveh was a city they had turned to water the earth in eastern countries; by fields where the simple, moneyless and so careless tillers of the earth paused from their tasks to look at us who passed. A smiling land, with no canker in its beauty, a land of quiet peace.

On through its gentle, slight undulations, now leaving the great road away on our right, and passing by where the cattle grazed in low-lying meadows. By reed

huts where children sang as they played in the sunshine, and dark-eyed women watched our passing, until at nightfall we stayed to rest at the place that had been prepared for us. Then on through the freshness of a new day, the rickshaw wheels passing noiselessly over grassy ways till at last we ended our journey at the garden paradise beyond the river bridge, and my princess came to my arms to rest.

IF I try, in my own mind and apart from this writing, to put into concrete incidents that last interval of happiness—for I know no other phrase that would describe it—before I left the little country where Ag ruled, the incidents elude me. To attempt to grasp a love such as was Eve's and mine, to dissect it and set it down in words that some other may understand, is mere futility—I have tried once to do this, and the measure of my failure is in these pages. Of what avail would it be to try here, and to fail again?

Yet, in my own justification for loving her so deeply that she was blood and flesh and bone of me, I would in some way enshrine my princess high over the wayside where all men pass, that all may see her. "Just a woman," would be the cynic's word, but in these days she was more, a being of ever varying moods, a bewildering series of revelations—passionate as a tempest-ridden sky, tender as the last glow after a rain-washed sunset in late spring, strong as summer's warmth, gentle and yielding as love's own self, was Eve of the house by the river. Beautiful as dawn, and glad in her beauty that was mine, since it was hers to give me; glad of the wealth of her silken hair that made a curtain about my face, glad of the light in her shining eyes that spoke love as I loved, and joy in love that called to love. . . . Ah, but words are such little things!

Were it given to the world's real lovers to tell what love may be, there would grow up and blossom a new language, such music of speech as was when the stars sang together. This I say who have known, and felt, and comprehended love, through and with Eve, passionate, sweet wonder of a land of wonder, given to me in the city of wonder, my princess with the shining eyes who was all to me. I have but to close my own eyes even now to hear again her whispering call, or in thought feel and respond to the thrill of her tender laughter; I have but to reach out, and again I am waiting for the velvet touch of arms reaching to enfold, their contact speaking, as spoke her voice or mine, the one thought that was born in our twin minds answering each to the other before words could form.

These broken fragments of the great reality I set down, not with intent to describe our days, but in very pride at possession of my Eve, pride in having known such love.

To describe, to record? Mere futility! There would be a touch of the ludicrous if I described just how Eve tried to understand when I told her what a revolver shot is like, or recorded how she clung to my arm when I first pulled the trigger in her presence, that she might know by actual experience how the magic Watkins and I had brought to the country was no magic, but a noisy, deadly fact of everyday. Or how, in a dozen shots or more, she learned to look for the bullet's striking, and so far got the idea of magic out of her mind as to agree with me that the shot might have been a better one.

I began to teach her English; the names of common things; such words as "beautiful" and "sweet," with its variations of meaning—they were laughter-lighted lessons, for we had come to the house by the river to play like children, before facing the world, that was so new to her, as man and woman side by side. She got and used the phrase "my man" with a caressing inflection that gave the words new meaning. And, down by the bank where the garden sward sloped to the river, we found a flat-bottomed boat with a paddle and a high-backed seat for Eve—a curious craft, for the back of the seat stood up in a point like that of an ecclesiastical chair, yet, not so high but that she could tilt her head back as she sat for me, standing behind her with the paddle, to bend over and kiss her lips.

In this boat, when we went on the river, we kept to the shallows by the bank; out in mid-stream the current was swift and strong, and at our first venture it swept the boat a long way down in spite of my inexpert paddling, until I had sense to get back close to the bank and there, out of the sweep of the deeper waters, paddle back to the garden.

THUS five days fled swiftly, and at near on noon of our sixth day in the house by the river we sat together in our room, for the greater heat of the day had driven us in until the sun should have dropped some way down the sky. As we sat, Eve pointed through the window aperture,

whence the curtain was drawn aside, and, following her pointing, I saw a rickshaw—it may have been a mile away—coming along the track we had followed six days since.

"Is it coming here, to us?" Eve asked me.

"It could come to nobody else," I said. "A messenger from Philip, perhaps, or from your father."

"He is pausing where the tracks divide," she remarked—for there was two tracks, one that led straight to the house, and one that wound up to the farther end of the gardens, to come in by the servant's quarters. "If you go to him, you may learn his message for us the sooner."

"True," I said, "I will go."

And with a kiss for her I picked up my ammunition belt with the revolver in its holster—for even here with her I kept the revolver always by me—and buckled the belt on as I went, wondering what had happened that Watkins or Ag had sent to break in on our idyll before the time when it should end. As I went I pointed, and the rickshaw took the right track and came toward me.

The man within it was Bar-Ug. He leaped down and ran toward me, and before he spoke his message his eyes told of fear, so that I questioned in my mind what could have happened. He stayed only to bow to me—the message admitted of no more formalities.

"Ner-Ag, king, to you and to Eve his daughter—return at once to Kir-Asa with Eve your wife, and until you have her safe within the royal palace do not for one instant leave her side. Macer, risen from the dead, leads the things of the waste to destroy the women of the country."

I did not answer, but turned and ran. Again I saw Macer's limp body curved over the jutting rock, his arms dangling down lifelessly—he *must* have been dead, so to hang suspended on the hillside for so long a time. And how came it that Ag in Kir-Asa knew of this while we two knew nothing? I overlooked the fact that we were out of the world, voluntarily cutting ourselves off from it for the time. And—were the things of the waste potent, or was the legend of their evil power based on a mere myth?

For all these questionings, with many more that came swift as thoughts will come and pass in stress, I ran, leaving Bar-Ug to follow as he would—there was a sentence in his message which chilled me, out here away from Eve—"Do not for one instant leave her side." There was double wisdom in the command, for apart from his evil intent against the whole country, whom could Macer choose to strike with greater glee than the man who had wrought his overthrow and the daughter of the man who held his throne? I ran, the half-mile or so back to our house by the river, passed from the midday sunglare to the cool of the central corridor, and on into the room in which I had left Eve.

She lay at full stretch on the floor, face downward, as if she had fallen thus in trying to escape from the room. Bending over her was something of which the outline was hazy and almost transparent, even in this full daylight, something indescribably hateful, revolting, demoniacal, radiating deathly evil as a fire radiates heat, and as it bent down toward her still form it made the guggling, clucking noise we had heard in the place where ghosts chase women.

My sight and hearing of it were momentary; I know that its outline was vaguely that of a human form; I do not even know if its head had a face; it had arms that, when I entered the room, reached down toward where Eve lay, but as I passed the threshold these arms retracted, like the eye-stalks of a snail being drawn in, but swiftly.

I got my revolver loose after an infinity of pause; the thing, beast or ghost or devil, reared to a full length that was more than my own height, shortened again and swelled as might a similarly shaped mass of rubber if a weight were placed on top of it, and as I fired elongated itself in a great leap that carried it through the window aperture. As it went, either through my shot or through striking itself on the stone, it left a full brown stain on the ledge. I rushed to the window to see it running with far more than human speed toward the trees, and as I fired again saw, not far from the point at which the flying figure seemed to aim, the face of Macer, who peered from among the shrubs. At my shot he disappeared.

I thrust the revolver back in its holster and turned to where Eve lay motionless and as if dead on the floor. Steps sounded along the corridor, and as I lifted Eve in my arms Bar-Ug stood in the doorway of the room.

"Search the gardens," I bade. "Macer is here."

Bar-Ug went instantly, and I was free to devote myself to Eve. She lay limp and

still in my arms, and her face that a few minutes ago had told of perfect health, was deathly pale—even her lips were pale, as if all the blood had been drained from her body.

I carried her over to the padded settee on which we had been seated when she caught sight of Bar-Ug, and there sat, holding her in my arms. There was a faint and fluttering pulse discernible in the artery of her neck, and she breathed faintly and lightly, as if exhausted or very ill. I could see on her no sign of violence, nor any mark, nor had the horror appeared to touch her when I came on it, though whether it had touched her before my entrance I could not tell.

So for some minutes she lay still, and I heard the sounds made by the searchers in the garden as I held her. Then she opened her eyes, so slowly, and looked up at me.

"I have dreamed, dearest," she whispered, trying to smile at me, "dreamed all the evil of the world, and that you were no longer here to hold me. So terrible a dream . . ."

"Rest, darling—I shall not leave you. Rest here in my arms, in your place."

"I am so cold," she whispered again, "and your clasp is so warm and strong. Kiss me, my beloved, before I sleep."

I bent my head and kissed her lips, and they were cold, so cold! She nestled closely to me as her eyelids drooped over eyes grown dim, suddenly grew rigid and shuddering, and as suddenly relaxed, with a little sigh as if she were tired, and grew quite inert. There was no longer any fluttering pulse nor any breath, for my Eve was dead.

I who had failed to tell of the splendour of her love, the glory of happiness in which Eve, living, enshrouded me—how shall I find any words to picture my despair as, with her limp body in my arms, I knew myself left desolate?

AT SOME point in that day Bar-Ug was beside me, and he spoke to me. Of what he said, the one word "Macer" pierced through the numbness of my loss, telling me that there was yet a task to be accomplished. I asked, "Where is he?" and Bar-Ug pointed the way he had gone. It was down the course of the river, along its right bank—that is, the river shut him in to the western province, the "province of the king's friends," and barred him from the fertile centre of the country between this point and Kir-Asa. He must return and cross by the bridge, or else go nearly up to the great road, if he meant to advance eastward to Kir-Asa with his terrible following, for this was the river which, winding round from the back of the volcano, swung westward for some miles and then turned to flow through the lowlands of the south before losing itself in the morasses which formed the country's boundary.

I do not know what I said to Bar-Ug, save that I bade him see my wife's body borne to Kir-Asa, there to wait my coming.

4—SMASHING HEADLINE NOVELS—4

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There was in my mind one clear thought, that I must go out and kill Macer. That he could not escape me, but that I should kill him, was to me as inevitable as if he waited my will just outside the room in which I knelt beside the body of Eve. Once or twice in life we met these certainties of accomplishment, such as was this to me.

Before we left Kir-Asa, I had packed my own clothing in which I had come to the country, and it had been brought here for me. The linen clothing I had been wearing was of almost silken fineness, and I had had a thought that there might be cause to lay aside this bridal array, in case of any expedition Eve and I might choose to make together. Thus now, unhastingly, I put off the white linen of the country, and put on my own soiled and stained and shabby stuffs.

I knew there was no need for haste, for Eve was dead, and whether I set out to-day or to-morrow, Macer was mine to kill. I did not question how I should find him—I had but to follow, and knew it would be as if I were a hound following a scent up wind. I buckled on the revolver belt, and called for Bar-Ug. "Tell Ner-Ag the king that when I come to Kir-Asa it will be either to bring Macer living for doom, or because I know past all question that Macer's dead body follows me."

Then, last before I set out, I went to where Eve lay as if asleep, and for a little space knelt with my head down on her breast. Once, for farewell until we two shall stand face to face beyond the stars, I kissed her on the brow, and went from the presence of her body, knowing that her spirit was with me still. But, last before I left, after the kiss that was a farewell rather to the days of our happiness than to her—forever the sense of her presence enfolds me—I bent over and took from the still form the emerald necklace my darling had worn all the days since I had first seen and loved her. This I took as the only tangible thing which should form memory of Eve—it had lain on her breast, to which her arms had drawn me, and it is round my neck now.

That last pursuit of Macer was more dream than reality, a seemingly endless going on to the accomplishment of a thing as inevitable as sunset or human death. I went unhasting—as a weasel tracks down a hare, relentlessly, caring nothing whether he ran or hid or stood to fight. When I set out, one pointed—it may or may not have been Bar-Ug—and spoke some words that had no meaning for me, except that among them was Macer's name. I turned toward the way of the pointing, and left the house by the river, Eve's emerald necklace pressing, new and thus a thing in my consciousness, against my breast where her head had lain so short a while ago.

More dream than reality, things and men and places growing large before me, coming abreast of me, passing behind. At times I would question, and in answer one would point, but in what shape I put the question, or who answered, I do not know. I have a memory of men wide-eyed with fear who knelt before me, the king's friend, and pointed me onward, but whether that was at the beginning or toward the end of the chase I do not know.

A memory of a little group of reed huts in the low-lying, fertile lands near the southern border, and of a man kneeling by where a woman lay dead. One pointing me onward, and the sun falling toward the western hills. I do not think I stopped to eat or drink on that last pursuit. I had not eaten since Eve sat with me in the morning, but I felt no sense of hunger, nor any fatigue.

A memory of the sun having fallen within a little distance of the western hills, under whose line against the sky was blue-grey indistinctness such as the distances always show toward the day's end, as one looks toward the sun. Another woman lying dead on the ground with her man crouched beside her in still despair, and another man with hand outstretched, pointing, since the king's friend had asked the way. Yet I do not remember asking—perhaps they read my errand from my face.

A memory of guggling, hazy shapes, ever changing place and seeming to change form, and among them one figure solid and distinct, material, capable of human suffering and death. That figure fleeing away, and in the end driven, by I know not what chance, against an unclimbable rock wall, a portion of the barrier ridge on that southern border, through which its first habitants cut the gully of the river. The things of the waste wirbled and guggled in a horseshoe recess of this ridge, a curve of which the outer points were nearly half a mile apart.

They were strong by reason of the dead and maniac women who marked their path across the land, and they gibbered and capered, shameless, fearless, in the light of the setting sun. Yet, dregs of the world's forming as they were, essence

of evil with which unto this day the earth is plagued, I had no fear of them; in the slow rousing from first numbness, the realisation that Eve's arms could never again in this life enfold me, I was beyond fear of the things of the waste, fearful only lest Macer should escape me.

Into this curve of the low cliff he fled with his attendant devils, looking for a path that should take him over and beyond the ridge—but there was no path. The hazy shapes drew near to him as if they looked to him for protection, and as I came closer I saw him panting open-mouthed, and wild-eyed, a trapped thing that had pawned its soul and already was scorched by the flames of the hell it had made—no longer a man.

I fired one shot into the capering, guggling crowd, and the things fled all ways at the noise—they were less than child-like in their fear. They sped by me, emanating pollution as they passed, but because of the spirit of Eve that went with me they could not harm me. They left Macer alone, a trapped rat before me, ugly and fierce, turned to fight for his life at last.

HE CAME at me from where he had shrunk back against the rock wall, barely a score yards away. I could see his teeth shining as he snarled his hate, and could see the gleam in his eyes that said he meant this fight to be his life or mine. He came toward me as his brother's spear had come in the council hall, the swift movement drawn out by a trick of my mind to an age of waiting. When he had covered a little more than half the distance, I raised the revolver and fired.

The heavy bullet, striking him below the waist, smashed his left hip joint, and he spun and fell within four yards of me. There he lay quite still, while I went and looked down at him. I recall how a little wisp of smoke went up from the revolver shot and melted away in the sunset stillness.

I looked down on him, waiting till his foxy eyes should unclose. But when they showed, they were no longer foxy, for the nearness of death brought him full realisation of the awful thing he had done in his madness. His moan was no expression of the physical pain of his wound, but was dragged from him by sight of the hell he had made, the utter impossibility of reparation, and the knowledge that he, son of the royal race, had fallen to a lower depth, one more hideous, than that of the things that now fled from him back to their wastes.

"What have I done?" he moaned. "What have I done?"

But his new clarity of vision inspired me with no pity. I bent down over him, placed the revolver muzzle against his temple, and pulled the trigger. I saw the circle of burnt hair round the hole the bullet made, the shattered skull and bloody mess, and the body that quivered and presently lay quite still. Then I turned away, knowing he could trouble the land no more.

There were men and women who clustered round me, crying out to me as saviour and deliverer, and bidding me rest with them. I bade them, as the command of the king, bear the body of Macer to Kir-Asa that Ner-Ag, king, might see with his own eyes what had come to pass, and then I pushed my way through them, not heeding. I turned eastward, to where the column of Kir's smoke went up into the sky, for in the city under the smoke column I should find the body of my Eve, and there would be Ag and Watkins, my friends. I pressed on, still feeling no fatigue—only a growing, clutching pain about my heart as the sense of loss grew heavier with the approach of night. Thus on until I came to the bank of the river which I must cross to go to Kir-Asa—the river on a higher reach of which was set a garden, and the house where Eve and I had loved. These waters that hurried past had flowed by the Eden of our devotion.

Here, too—I saw with a stab of added pain—was moored to the bank such a boat as that in which Eve had sat with head flung back while I bent over and kissed her lips. Here, without going up the stream to find a bridge, was means of crossing to go on to Kir-Asa; I stepped into the boat, took up the paddle, and cast off the rope that held the craft to the shore. A warning cry came from beyond the bank I had left, but I took no heed.

The nose of the boat swung out toward mid-stream, and I plied the paddle to send it across to the farther bank—it was in my mind, then, to get from the river valley to higher ground, so that I might see a course to steer before the light failed—I would not think of rest, but would press on to Kir-Asa. Then suddenly it was as if a hand took hold on the prow of the boat and flung it violently to point down stream. The tremendous force of the current tore the paddle from my hand, and I was

helpless in a current that swung me onward to the southern border at the pace of a horse's gallop.

The sun had just set, but still the earth was lighted. I saw the land where I had won and lost so much slip past, caught one glimpse of the even line against the sky that I knew was the hewn wall about Kir-Asa the mighty, and saw the pillar of smoke go up from Kir. I knew this for the end, and, save for the thought of Watkins, was almost content.

The ridge of rock that formed the border of the fertile lowlands for miles, here in the south, rose before me ere the light died out from the sky. I saw in the ridge a yawning cleft, square-cut, that looked like a precipice edge, or like the brink of a waterfall, for it formed a skyline as I approached it. As this came before me in the day's last gleam, the boat shot forward as if propelled by human agency at a faster rate than the tearing current of the stream. And now I was on the brink, now over—Kir-Asa was lost to me.

There showed a reach of nearly a mile of river running at an angle between smooth-cut rock walls, down the slanting channel that had been hewn through this ridge when the world was young. The surface of that reach was dark and smooth, without a ripple, like a sheet of deeply stained glass, yet so fast did the waters flow in their smooth-cut bed that I felt the wind in my face as the boat sped down—was it minutes or only seconds that I endured the mad, silent rush through the changing of day with night? I recalled that, back in Kir-Asa, Watkins had spoken of how we three should go down this silent torrent, Eve and I together, and himself at the steering oar.

I heard a roar ahead, saw dimly a boil of white foam at the end of the hewn incline—I saw this dimly because of the mist that came before my eyes at thought of how Eve had planned to share this peril with me. I stood up in the unguided craft as the roar grew louder, peered ahead at the broken water where the river fell to level, and as the boat's prow struck on the boiling surge I was flung forward—I remember my chest striking the high back of the seat like that one on which Eve had sat. . . .

AND that happened just three months ago.

There were two men, named Carr and West, who had heard of an oil seepage in marsh lands. They took guns and quinine, and a party of twelve bearers, and set out to scour the marshes, but they found no oil. At one dawn, in a little creek of almost stagnant water, they found a quaintly built boat with its gunwale almost awash, and in the boat was a senseless and nearly dead man whom they took to their camp and nursed back to consciousness.

I remember looking out as I lay in the shelter they made for me, and seeing, very far off and faint to the north-eastward—so far off, and so faint against the skyline—a pillar of smoke that went up and feathered out at the top like the foliage of a palm. So far off, and so faint. . . .

They were very good to me, these two men. I lay in the shelter they made for me, and they kept to their camp for three days because of me; after that, as I grew no better, they made the bearers improvise a stretcher on which to carry me. My chest was bruised black, and there was some internal injury that caused a grating feeling when I moved, while from time to time, I would spit up gouts of blood. Yet there was not over-much pain.

West judged that when the bruise on the chest was made I must have broken a rib or two, and the jagged edges of bone had penetrated the coating of the lungs. Carr said that, if it had been so, I should be dead. Having finished their prospecting, they determined to carry me to a mission station. . . .

Now, since all this is ordinary, everyday experience, I have no intention of relating it in detail, beyond showing that these two men were as kind and considerate as men could be. They tended me on the long, weary journey, like trained nurses, and in the end we came to the mission station, to find in the missionary—he lived there alone with a staff of native helpers—one of those rare, fine men God makes sometimes to give the rest of us faith in our kind. He knew something of medicine and surgery, as do most of his craft, and he told me that though there would be a boat bringing his letters in about five weeks' time, he would not advise me to attempt the journey to civilization until the boat after that, unless I really wanted to kill myself. Carr and West, who wanted to go off to the westward to prospect some more marsh lands for oil, told me that they would be compelled to miss that first boat in any case, and would see me safe to my journey's end on its successor.

Now, for my own peace of mind's sake,

I wanted to send some word of Watkins to the outside world, and in thinking how this might be done I remembered that, when he and I made the contract that took us to Kir-Asa, he had given me a cheque on a bank in Singapore, the name of which I knew.

I wrote a letter to the manager of the bank, asking him to forward the enclosure to the nearest relative of Philip Watkins, who had an account with him—or to the nearest relative whose name and address he knew.

Then I set about writing the enclosure. At first it took the form of a long letter, but the few details of our journey I could include even in a very long letter made an utterly preposterous and incredible story, so that after two or three attempts I gave it up, and wrote the story out in full. Now, when Carr and West return, they will take this manuscript to Singapore, and hand it with its covering letter to the manager of Watkins' bank wherever it may be.

In a separate envelope will be enclosed a sketch map I have made, to show where we landed from the tramp steamer to begin the journey to Kir-Asa. And whatever he or she may do with the manuscript, I trust that the recipient of it and the map will, at Watkins' request and mine, hold the map as secret, understanding that in writing I have kept in mind how Watkins and I promised each other that we would keep the garden land of Kir-Asa a secret from the world, that not through us should civilization be let in to spoil it. This, I pray, may be allowed to be.

For my own peace I must send this message to his kinfolk, that, if they so will, they may go or send to find him; if they will not do this, still they may know that I, who am proud to have been his friend, have placed on record for them this portion of the life of a very brave and courteous gentleman, friend of a king whom he made in a city far older than any on earth.

Often I wonder concerning him. Did he make great search for me, when the bodies of Eve my wife and of Macer who compassed her death came to Kir-Asa the mighty, or did he know, through the one who uttered that warning cry as I pushed out to be caught by the current of the river, how it was that I did not return? Did he in the end take the stone jar of emeralds, gift of Ner-Ag, king, and with it go down the gully of the river that sucked me out from Ner-Ag's land, or did he go the way of the place where ghosts chase women and the great gorge of the trembling bridge?

Or does he perhaps still stand beside the king of his making, his kinsman and friend, by the carven throne of stone that is in the council hall of the king's palace, away in the hewn city of wonder? However these things may be. I feel that he is not dead.

Somewhere in his own inimitable way, he is fighting life, and I would that I

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Warwick Deeping's unforgettable novel of a man who lived twice—

THE MAN WHO WENT BACK

Here is the breathtaking story of a man whom time forgot: a man who left his home to meet a woman in modern London—and found her pagan counterpart in ancient Rome!

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might at last grip his hand and stand beside him.

Thus at times, when he is in my thoughts, I question. It may be that in the end I shall go back to Kir-Asa to see if he is still there, and then again I feel that sight of the city of wonder, of Ag's kindly face, and the sound of voices speaking the language in which my princess talked with me, would bring to my heart too keen an ache.

It may be that I shall go back to Watkins—I do not know. In any case, I shall not return to England. I have nothing of great worth except Eve's emerald necklace, and that will be buried with me when my time comes, although its value is, as Watkins said, the price of a king's place. For me it has a greater value, since when I knew my princess it had lain on her breast.

Carr and West will take this manuscript and the map to Singapore, and I shall not go with them. Yet perhaps I shall not go back to seek for Watkins, after all.

This last week or two I have known myself not so strong, and yesterday the hæmorrhage from my chest began again. The missionary has just been in for one of his cheery talks with me, but to-day he seemed not so cheery as usual; he said nothing definite, this good man whose care has been more than I can ever repay, but I gather from his manner—which is almost but not quite pitying—that I may, perhaps, go out beyond the swing of the tides of earth, to where is waiting my Eve with the shining eyes and arms outstretched to clasp me at my coming. I can still recall the tender note in her voice as she told me she would wait for me, beyond the stars.

It may even be—and this in reality I desire most—that her waiting is near its end.

I have told such a tale as has never been told, and in sending it on think that the Watkins who receive it will see its truth in its linked inevitability. If thus he sees it, and if I go to Eve, it is for him to find his kinsman, my friend, should he wish. As for me, life had its real beginning when first I took Eve in my arms, and now lying here with the story told, I realize that it ended for me when I laid my princess down.

This is all.

A NOTE BY THE RECIPIENT OF THE MANUSCRIPT

This manuscript was forwarded to me from my cousin's bankers in Singapore, but the map of which mention is made in its concluding pages was not enclosed. I have been unable to find any traces of oil prospectors named Carr or West, and it may be noted that the missionary who is spoken of as having taken charge of Faulkner is not mentioned by name, while the manner of writing the story is such as to give very little clue, even to one who knows the Pacific archipelagoes, to the precise direction in which to search for the coast on which my cousin landed with his companions.

Also, unfortunately, the old diary of which mention is made in the story is no longer in existence; otherwise, it might have been possible to find traces of my cousin from the directions contained in it. Although for over two years I have caused the most diligent search to be made, and inquiries set afoot in every possible way, so far there had been no satisfactory result.

It is beyond question that my cousin was in Penang with two men named Bent and Faulkner nearly four years ago, and none of the three has since been heard of.

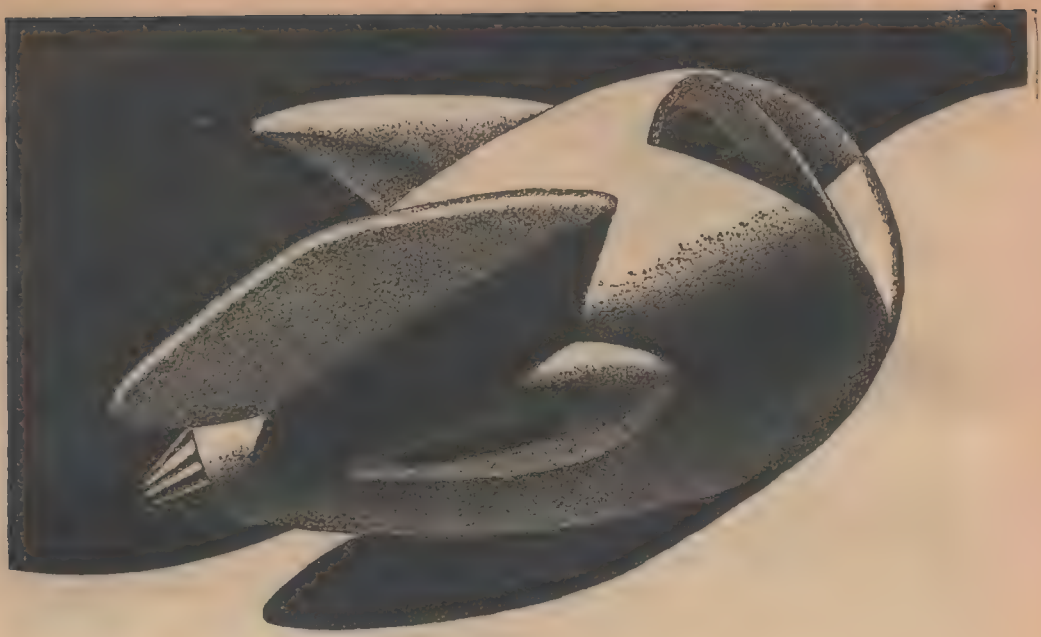
Publication of this manuscript may lead to discovery of the name of the boat by which they left Penang, or to that of the missionary (though this I think unlikely, since in all probability he will never see the story) or of the men Carr and West.

Leonard S. Watkins.

MASTERS OF FANTASY

A. Merritt—"Dweller in the Mirage"—Died 21 August, 1943.

Heart failure at 59 robbed the fantasy world of one of its richest imaginations, when Abraham Merritt went through the Dragon Glass. Heart-stopping in their beauty were his women of witchery—Santhu, Sharane, Norhala, Evalie—and wondrous in the extreme his adventures outside the normal scheme of space and time. His short stories were single polished gems; his novels, "The Ship of Ishtar," "The Metal Monster," "The Moon Pool," et al, flawless necklaces of ensorcelling splendour. Men of two other tongues knew his word wizardry, too. G. Gordon Dewey, the noted Merrittophile, says of him: "He was a legend in his time: *The Lord of Fantasy*. His feet were firmly planted behind one of America's most important editorial desks of the newspaper world, but his heart—his heart was ever succumbing to the siren call of the Snake Mother, and his head inclining to the tinkle of invisible elfin bells. The lure of the lore of long and long and long ago was strong within him—and communicated itself evocatively to his myriad of admirers."



THE DAY OF THE DEEPIES

By
Murray Leinster

KENIE waked with all the shivering ecstasy one feels at the age of thirteen on a morning when excitement looms deliciously ahead. She lay still for a moment, listening to the noises that told her the house was awake. Her brother Tom, down the hall, was doggedly enduring the squawks and howls of the television set he'd put together from wreckage their father had brought back from what used to be Camden. Then there was the whooshing roar of the tractor, pulling past the front of the house with its monstrous wood-gas generator on the back and the squeak that Bub Taylor said was metal-fatigue setting in. But it couldn't be dismantled, for youthening, until the fall wheat had been planted.

Her mother's voice came out of what had been the air-conditioning duct when air conditioners still worked.

"Kenie! It's late!"

"I'm up and practically dressed," said Kenie, anticipating the fact by seconds. "Right down, Mother!"

She slid out of bed. She almost danced across the room to look at herself in the mirror.

The mirror was a trifle leprous, in spots, where the silver had tarnished through, but she found her own eyes bright and anticipating. She beamed at her reflection. She didn't know how things would turn out, but excitement was sure.

Can Doomsday be at hand . . . can the world lie dying of its own fury . . . as long as one brave youth and one girl with a dream still live?

Her very best boy friend, Bub, had told her in strict confidence that the neighbors were coming over today to warn her father that Tom had to stop fiddling with science. And that ghastly deepie, Mr. Wedderson, was coming to receive the family's answer to his proposal for Aunt Sarah's hand. And Kenie was practically certain that Roland—whom her sister Cissie used to be in love with—was hiding out somewhere in the woods. So it would be a full day.

She went blithely down the stairs in work-stained shorts and jumper. It was just as exciting to be thirteen in the year 2096 as it had been when Kenie's great-great-grandmother watched soldiers march off to some war or other, back in the days when they had wars. Now, of course, war was just a word. There couldn't be a war when there was nothing to fight with and you didn't know whom to fight.

Anyhow, Kenie doubted that a war would be as exciting as knowing that Bub was secretly working on an electric generator in the cellar he'd dug under his father's barn, or having a delicious suspicion that Roland was hiding near-by and that Cissie had seen him at least once.

Roland would be hung as a matter of public safety if he were discovered, because he was a scientist. And if she merely hinted her suspicion of his presence to her brother Tom, he'd go crazy trying to find Roland to pump scientific information out of him, because Tom meant to be a scientist, too.

She felt that she could burst, but she seemed completely demure as she went into the kitchen. The great electric range and storage cabinet, off to one side, was used as a cupboard and working space for the preparation of meals. Her mother said it was wonderful, before a bomb fell over at Westport and then there wasn't any more electricity. Kenie'd always thought vaguely that it wasn't scrapped because they hoped that some day there might be

The whirring thing speeded up . . . the ship rose and hovered, and rose swiftly again . . . up and up . . . and up. . . .

electricity again. But she was not sure.

"Stay close to the house, Kenie," said her mother, as she put breakfast before her. "I may need you. Some of the neighbors are coming over to your father and we'll have to offer refreshments."

Kenie said mildly, "Does Tom know yet?"

Her mother looked at her sharply.

"What do you mean by that, Kenie?"

"Aren't they coming over to tell father that Tom has to stop messing with science? I told him not to get so confidential with that revolting Mr. Wedderson. I'll bet he's the one who passed the word that Tom was experimenting."

Her mother pressed her lips together.

"Kenie—"

"He's a deepie," said Kenie scornfully. "Oh, I know, Mother! Deepies are just displaced persons, and some of them are quite nice. They are people who've never settled down or who are afraid to settle down even if people would let them. They think if they keep moving, they'll be safe. 'Fraidy-cats! But some deepies are snoopers, too, and you know it!"

"Kenie!" said her mother. "Mr. Wedderson wants to marry your Aunt Sarah! He's quite a good blacksmith, he says, and with a family connection so he'd be allowed to settle down here—"

Kenie started to stuff her mouth full, and remembered that she was growing up, and took a dainty mouthful instead. She said with a vast calmness:

"Darling Mother, you don't fool me. You don't like him any more than I do. You're just as afraid he's a snooper. And with Roland—"

Her mother went white. Kenie's heart turned one complete somersault. Then it was true! Roland was back, and hiding out! Her mother knew it, as well as Cissie! Kenie's hand shook with the thrill as she gulped her milk in outward composure.

"Don't worry, Mother," she said calmly. "I won't say that to anyone else. But I notice things. I'm thirteen, now."

"I don't know where you get silly ideas about Roland," her mother began. But there were footsteps in the hall and she stopped short. She went on in an even, unhurried tone, "I think that if you took over the new calf this morning, since your father is so busy— Good morning, Sarah!"

Kenie's Aunt Sarah came into the kitchen. Kenie spoke to her politely. Aunt Sarah looked thrilled and haggard and defiant and sorrowful all at once, with a hint of tragedy queen thrown in. Kenie used to feel sorry for her because she'd never gotten married—Kenie intended to marry Bub when they both grew up—but Mr. Wedderson had ended her sympathy. He couldn't be anybody's ideal! He was untidy with a hint of greasiness. He wore thick eyeglasses and a smug air which wasn't suitable to a deepie, and he petted Kenie. With the pretense of treating her as a child, he patted her. Kenie frankly despised him—with an uneasy feeling underneath.

"Good morning, Martha," said Aunt Sarah. "Where is John? I simply must have a talk with him! Mr. Wedderson is coming—"

Kenie's mother said vaguely, "He's running the tractor, Sarah. I think he's been asking the neighbors if they object—"

"What have they to do with it?" demanded Aunt Sarah sharply. "My brother John is a leading citizen! If I choose to marry, why should the neighbors have anything to say?"

"You know how it is," said Kenie's mother soothingly. "People resent newcomers settling—"

"Would John send his own sister wandering?" demanded Aunt Sarah fiercely. "Must I wander through the woods and forests to be with the man I love, when he is a good blacksmith and one is needed here?"

Kenie choked on her milk. Aunt Sarah always managed to mess things up when she tried to be dramatic. Her mother said:

"Kenie! The calf—"

"Yes, Mother," said Kenie.

SHE drained the mug and managed not giggle until she got out of doors. Then she went down to the barn. It was a good barn, very old and with the wires for electric lights still in place. There were iron stalls for the cows and there had been an electric milking machine. It would be nice to have electricity to do things for you, Kenie reflected.

She milked an anxious cow who was bitterly indignant because her calf was muzzled. She led the calf into another stall and set to work to teach him to drink. It was rather fun, but she felt all churned up inside herself.

Roland was nice. He'd been gone for two years, now, because of course, when he practically said he was a scientist he couldn't stay around. It wouldn't have mattered before things happened and the big cities were either abandoned or de-

stroyed, and before the railroads stopped running, and all that. But since the world had got to be as it was, scientists weren't good neighbors. Everybody knew that. When scientists set to work to find out things, sooner or later a bomb fell from the sky. Then there was an empty place three or four miles across where people had lived, and things wouldn't grow there for a long time because the ground was all baked to a bricky, glassy kind of stuff that Kenie had never seen but had heard about. Only eight years ago a bomb had fallen on a locality only fifty miles away. And people said it was because there was a scientist there.

It wasn't his fault directly, though. It was because of the deepies. There were always deepies coming around—bright-eyed, usually skinny people who worked awhile and got a store of food and moved on. Lots of deepies were very respectable and nice, but there were some snoopers among them, and if a snooper found out that there was a scientist around, somehow or other they got word to whoever had planes and bombs—and then a bomb fell. So one must always be careful not to say anything nice about science. Bub was especially bitter because one mustn't even have electricity, and he was making a generator down in a secret cellar he'd dug. *He* was going to have electricity and keep it a secret.

The trouble with Roland was that he talked. As long as he just kept machinery in repair and made funny stuff that made welding easier, he was all right. He was crazy about Cissie, too, and she about him. But one day somebody said that people were better off nowadays than back when cities had millions of people in them, and Roland got mad. Right in front of everybody he said that people lived like pigs, now, compared to the old days. Running tractors on wood-gas and burning tallow lamps wasn't his idea of living, he said.

Science had made a world fit to live in, and fools had smashed it, Roland said. And then he declared defiantly that some day science would come back and the world would be better than ever, with electricity and airplanes and great cities and universities and books and television everywhere. And he said it where everybody could hear him!

Deepies were listening, so the neighbors had to act at once. They tried him right on the spot for advocating science, after what it had done to the world, and they ordered him to leave the locality and said they'd hang him if he came back. And they made sure all the deepies knew it. Kenie's own father was the sternest of Roland's judges, though he liked Roland a lot. Cissie'd cried for weeks, too, because she'd been going to marry him. But of course being ordered away from home made Roland a deepie, and nobody would let a deepie settle anywhere. Everybody was afraid that almost any deepie might be a snooper, reporting to whoever had bombs and planes. So naturally Cissie couldn't marry Roland.

Teaching the calf to drink, Kenie's anticipations rose. Roland's return was exciting. And Mr. Wedderson wanting to marry Aunt Sarah. He was a deepie who pretended to be enormously smitten with Aunt Sarah's charms. Now she was hounding Kenie's father to stand sponsor for him and get him permission to settle down here. Otherwise, of course, she'd have to go off and be a deepie, too, if she married him. But Kenie was scornfully sure that Mr. Wedderson was a snooper, and if he found out that Roland was back. . . .

That was something to shiver about! Cissie'd seen Roland. Kenie knew it. She used to be in love with him and still must be or she wouldn't have risked seeing him.

There was a trampling of many hoofs in front of the house. The far-away tractor stopped. Kenie looked out of the barn and saw her father walking across the fields. She heard Tom's television set still squawking. When he got it to work, it only brought silly things like talks on farming and how to keep well. But her father said that whoever was visicasting was very brave. They might be safe if they talked only about crop rotation and sanitation, but he warned Tom to tell him if they ever started to 'cast about science. Tom probably wouldn't tell him, though. Tom was always mooning around, trying out things and trying to find old books with science in them, but not talking.

Kenie watched, wide-eyed, as the neighbors rode up to the house. They were going to remind father that there were nearly five thousand people in this locality, and they couldn't have their lives jeopardized by a boy working on science. Tom could either give up his experiments or leave. They didn't want any bombs falling from a seemingly empty sky.

There was a rustling in the barn. There was Cissie; she put her arm around Kenie and hugged her a little. That wasn't unheard of, but it was unusual, Kenie wriggled.

"They've come to talk to father about Tom, Cissie!" Kenie was thrilled. "It's going to be awful! Maybe he'll get mad—"

"He won't," said Cissie. "He promised me he wouldn't."

They heard their father's voice inside the house. He was calling Tom. Then a great stillness settled on everything. The neighbors were gathered in the front parlor. They'd be grim. Just as grim as when they told Roland to leave or be hanged. Tom would be white and stricken. But their father would do what he could. He'd probably tell how Tom helped him in metal recovery—smelting down iron rust for fresh metal to make things that had to be made new. He'd been the first one to do that, with charcoal from the woods for fuel. The neighbors respected Kenie's father, and they wouldn't be mean. Just firm. Anyhow, they knew how Kenie's father felt about science. He'd been the first one to say that Roland had to go away, even though Roland and Cissie were planning to get married.

"Darling," said Cissie, and she hugged Kenie. "You like me, don't you? I want to tell you something."

"About Roland?" asked Kenie quickly.

Cissie seemed not to realize what she meant.

"Partly," she said softly. "But not altogether. I'm not sorry about Roland, you know. There used to be a wonderful world, and it got spoiled. But there's going to be a wonderful world again, and Roland will help to make it. That's worth while, isn't it?"

"The world's all right now," said Kenie blithely. "It's fun. But it might be nice to have electricity. Bub says so."

Cissie laughed a little.

"That's what I want to tell you. Not about electricity, but about Bub. I used to watch you tagging after him, and now he tags after you, Kenie. And as your older sister—"

Kenie said matter-of-factly, "Bub's going to marry me when we grow up. He doesn't know it yet, but I can make him do almost anything I want to."

Cissie's arm tightened about her.

"I— just want to say something serious, for once," she said quite gravely. "It's nice, loving someone, Kenie. And if you—grow up and marry Bub—you won't want to regret it. If he wants to be like everybody else, he'll be safe and so will you. But if he doesn't, Kenie—let him be different! Like Roland. Make him be careful, of course! Make him be terribly careful! But it will be worth it if he—risks his life and yours, too, to try to build back to a better world than the one that got smashed. Even for a little thing like electricity! Remember it, Kenie! Please!"

Kenie almost started to tell her that Bub was already building an electric generator in his secret cellar—Cissie could be trusted—but just then Mr. Wedderson came in view. He was marching toward the house, and he was fat and smug and revolting.

"That," said Kenie scornfully, "is Aunt Sarah's ideal! She wants us to call him Uncle! He'll want me to sit on his lap! I despise him!"

Cissie drew a quick breath. She looked oddly at Kenie, as if what she'd just said was a very special admonition that she might not be able to give again, but Kenie was sticking out her tongue at the waddling, stocky figure. Then she turned.

"We'd better go to the house," she said resentfully. "Mother's going to serve refreshments. I'd like to put a bug in Mr. Wedderson's mug. Or something worse!"

CISSIE followed silently. Their mother was moving about the kitchen. She nodded when they came in.

"Just in time," she told them. "You take in the coffee, Cissie, and Kenie, you carry the cakes."

Cissie was grown-up and calm, and Kenie envied her a little. Her own elbows seemed to get in the way going through doors. But she got to the parlor without mishap. Then she thrilled.

It was dreadful in there. Her brother Tom stood ashen-faced at one side of the room. The neighbors were unsmiling and grim. Not unkindly, of course. That made it worse. Kenie saw twin wet streaks on Tom's cheeks. He was seventeen, but the tears had come when he met the unalterable ultimatum of the neighbors and found that his own father backed it.

"It ain't," said a heavy voice doggedly, "that we're against anybody doin' what they want to, Tom. You got a life to live. If you want to go off and study science, you got a right to an' we ain't stoppin' you. But we got our families to think of. Where there's science and people know of it, bombs fall. You can go, an' you'll have no spite go with you. But you can't come back. You'll do a lot better by your family and friends if you stay amongst us an' be a good neighbor—"

Tom's hands were clenched tightly. He was the very picture of stunned grief. But suddenly he said in a choked voice:

"I'll bet it was Mr. Wedderson who told you! He started talking about science! He s-seemed to know a lot and I g-got interested and t-told him too much—"

The faces in the parlor hardened. There were thumpings outside. Kenie's mother went to the door. Cissie moved among the neighbors, offering them dandelion root coffee. Kenie's mother said:

"Why, yes, Mr. Wedderson! Quite a gathering! Come in!"

Eyes turned to the door. Mr. Wedderson entered. His eyes glittered behind their thick lenses. He swaggered a little.

"Gentlemen," he said pompously, "as a mere poor deepie, I have come to do you a service. Did you know that a plane landed near here two days ago?"

It had been quiet in the parlor, before. The only sounds had been the small clickings of the coffee mugs. But then the stillness became absolute. Kenie's breath stoppped. A plane landed here! That was science at its worst! She had never seen a plane in her life. They were deadly. Bub said they could have electricity again if it wasn't for snoopers, but nothing was more sure to bring a bomb from empty sky than a plane....

"It has not taken off," added Mr. Wedderson blandly. "It is still here. I have seen it. Does it surprise you?"

Kenie saw the faces of the neighbors. Every one was stony. A plane landed here—and known to a deepie! A bomb might fall at any instant. It might be falling now.... For a moment Kenie tried to imagine a bomb falling. She tried to picture this house, the barn, the fields yonder and the new-ploughed land, all gone and nothing but glassy, baked-hard emptiness in its place. She tried to imagine herself, Kenie, completely obliterated. But her imagination boggled at the last. She could not imagine a world without Kenie in it. She found herself licking her lips.

"We know nothing of it!" said her father fiercely. "You gentlemen have your horses here! We'll see if this is true! And if it is, Mr. Wedderson, you'll see what we do when people bring science into this locality!"

Mr. Wedderson said, blinking in a sort of smug meekness, "I had hoped to form a family connection and be allowed to settle here, but even we deepies do not like localities where science is favored. Here, even the young boys—"

"Tom!" said Kenie's father harshly. "Saddle three horses. One for Mr. Wedderson. Right away!"

Tom stumbled from the room. Kenie boiled. Mr. Wedderson had persuaded Tom to talk about science, and then told the neighbors on him! Now he told about a plane landing, and mentioned what deepies would think about it. And if deepies knew about it, sooner a later a snooper would know! He was threatening! He was telling them they'd better be nice to him! It was things like this that made people not let anybody stay in a locality unless he had kinfolk and relatives who'd share any danger he brought on the rest.

"Come, Kenie," said Cissie in her ear.

Kenie followed to the kitchen and shook with a murderous rage.

"I hate him!" she said furiously. "He told on Tom! If he's ever my uncle I'll—I'll—"

Cissie pushed her firmly out of doors. She followed. But her tone was shaky rather than indignant as she said:

"You mustn't talk like that, Kenie! Aunt Sarah thinks she's in love with him! If she heard you—"

Kenie grumbled, "You were in love with Roland, but it didn't make you crazy!"

"That," said Cissie quietly, "was real. Not just desperation. She isn't like—you and Bub, either, is she?"

"Huh!" said Kenie. "I can make Bub do almost anything I want!"

Tom rode blindly past them, leading two horses. One for his father and one for Mr. Wedderson. Tom was seventeen, and Kenie normally admired him with a trace of female condescension. But even she could see something close to dignity in his grief-stricken look.

"Poor Tom!" said Cissie.

Her voice was soft enough, but her eyes were oddly hard as she looked back at the house. There was a clattering of hoofs and the neighbors rode off with Mr. Wedderson in their midst. He said a plane had landed—and a plane was sure to bring a bomb. He was going to show them where it was. Most deepies would simply run. There was something—

Kenie watched breathlessly. She would have liked to go, but she was a girl, and if they found out who had landed the plane there'd be a hanging. A sudden thought struck her. Roland! Suppose it was Roland who came in the plane! Suppose her father helped to hang Roland because he was a scientist and he'd come back after being warned not to....

Kenie jerked her head to stare at Cissie. If it was Roland, Cissie knew it. She knew that they were going to hunt for whoever

had landed the plane. Cissie looked quite pale, though entirely composed. Entirely. She looked startingly grown up.

There was a yell, and a gangling horse jumped the fence behind the barn. Bub waved to Kenie. He always arrived that way. He was sixteen. And Kenie squealed at sight of him and dashed to meet him. Speculations were unimportant now. She poured out an almost incoherent account of the morning's happenings, from the formal warning to Tom, to Mr. Wedderson's notification of the incredible fact that a plane had landed near-by and they might all be blown up any second.

Bub simply wheeled his horse about, his lips set. Kenie jumped in front of him.

"You've got to take me!" she cried fiercely. "I told you about it! You've got to take me! You won't dare show yourself anyhow—"

He thrust down a bony hand. She caught it and scrambled up. He dug his heels into the horse's sides and they went off at a shambling gallop, Kenie astride behind him and clinging to his waist. She was filled with an ecstasy amounting almost to delirium. This was excitement! She and Bub trailing the neighbors on the way to destroy an airplane! Perhaps to hang Roland! Nothing so deliciously thrilling had ever happened in the world before!

Bub said tragically, "All my life I've wanted to see a plane, and the only chance I'll ever get is to see the neighbors smash one!"

Kenie was abashed by such grief, but nothing could make her unhappy while such thrilling events went forward. They sighted the cavalcade a long distance ahead. They trailed it. It swung aside into the woods. Bub dared close up until he could see the thrashing of branches as the horsemen forced their way through low-hanging trees.

A LONG time later the cavalcade halted. Kenie could feel the tension in Bub's body. He reined aside.

"Come on!" he said feverishly. "We'll hide the horse and sneak up to see before it's all smashed—"

It was a matter only of seconds before he and Kenie were dashing, hand in hand, from one thick patch of brushwood to another to get where they could see what impended.

It was Kenie who jerked him aside and pointed.

"There!"

They saw perfectly through a gap among the trees. There were the horses, stamping and snuffling in an uneasy group. The men advanced silently toward a silvery white object on the ground. The plane wasn't big, and somehow it looked awkward. It looked as if it had been built of inadequate materials, by men who'd made ingenuity take the place of equipment. There were little pipes sticking out of it astern. There were fins—not wings—and there was a folded-up contrivance which Kenie guessed excitedly was a helicopter screw. She'd seen pictures.

"Rocket-drive," said Bub in a broken, mourning whisper. "Atmospheric rocket, Kenie. Not like the ones men went to the evening star with, once. But, oh, isn't it beautiful!"

It wasn't. Kenie stared with all her eyes, but to her it was not beautiful. It was merely extraordinarily thrilling. Her eyes went to the human figures. Mr. Wedderson looked brisk and shrewd and very different from the way he usually did. He stood back while the others went grimly to the plane and pulled open its door and went in. They went over it in every possible fashion, looking for some clue to who had brought it. Kenie's father said harshly:

"Anyhow, we can pile brush on it and set it afire!"

Then he stopped. Mr. Wedderson stood composedly with something like a little switch in his hand, only it had a cup on it and he held that to his mouth. He seemed to be talking into it.

There was a dreadful stillness. Then Mr. Wedderson grinned.

"This," he told the neighbors, still holding the cup near his mouth, "is a radio and I am talking to the people who have planes and bombs. They can hear everything I say. They do not want the plane destroyed. So you will not destroy the plane."

Men made a concerted small noise like a growl.

"I brought you here and had you go into it and handle it," said Mr. Wedderson with an infuriating smugness, "because it was possible that whoever left it had mined it —set explosives to destroy meddlers. But you are not destroyed. So I shall fly it to where I came from, and we shall examine it. Our radar said that it was even faster than our planes! But you will let me take it because your whole community will be bombed within minutes if you do not."

He grinned at them. Enragingly. But

there was absolute dead silence save for the stamping and snorting of the horses. Mr. Wedderson walked over to the plane. The neighbors made way for him, their hands clenched. He got in and touched something. The folded-up thing reached up and expanded. It began to move, at first slowly and then more swiftly. A little puff of vapor came from one of the pipes at the stern.

All this in dead silence.

The plane shifted itself around bodily. It slid forward over fallen leaves until it was no longer under a tree, but under open sky. Mr. Wedderson grinned at the neighbors.

"You are very docile," he said blandly, "so I have reported that you need not be bombed. And your funny sister—" He looked at Kenie's father—"was very amusing. Tell her I laugh."

The whirring thing speeded up. The plane rose, and hovered, and rose swiftly again. It danced lightly up above the treetops.

Up and up and up. . . . It was a bare speck when vapor streamed from behind it.

It moved forward. The blurred disk of the lift-screw vanished suddenly and it was merely a mote which moved so fast that the eye lost trace of it. Then it was gone.

Bub was crying almost happily, "B-beautiful!" he gasped. "Oh, b-beautiful! B-but he took it away...."

Then he sobbed. And then Kenie's father loomed up sternly. He'd seen her. He opened his mouth to ask how she'd gotten there, and saw Bub. He said nothing.

He waved his hand, and Tom came numbly over with the three horses from home.

They went to Bub's tethered horse. Kenie mounted the now spare animal. They went back toward home. The neighbors were riding off singly, every man's face like stone.

"And now," said Kenie's father tiredly, "we ought to hang Roland."

Then Tom spoke thickly, "I'm—I'm sorry, Dad," he said, "but if—if this is—what you have to do—not to have bombs fall, I—I'm going away. Maybe I'll only be a deepie, but—if there's science anywhere on earth—"

Bub gulped and said uncertainly, "I—guess I'll go too, Tom."

For an instant Kenie was fiercely proud of her brother and of Bub. She, too, felt the bitter scorn of youth for the compromises older people make for the sake of youth. But then she realized that their going away would mean they'd be like Roland.

They couldn't come back. They'd be hanged, if they did.

She made no sound. She rode on stoically, a small figure in shorts and jumper, with her hair hanging in a pigtail down her back. But tears flowed down her cheeks. She licked them furtively from the corners of her mouth.

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"Eh? Desperate?" said her father. Then he grunted. "I forgot. You boys have thought science was play. It's not. You had to learn a lesson, and I think Tom has. You'll never talk too much to a deepie again, Tom!"

"I'm—going to be one," said Tom, doggedly.

"Being careful gets to be a habit," said Kenie's father, dryly. "It's one you'd better learn, Tom. But Roland won't be hung. Of course! We'll all say so—all the neighbors. But actually he's going to be married. To Cissie. Kenie's to be bridesmaid. It will all happen after supper tonight. They'll be off before morning."

Then he added, "Roland flew that plane here."

Kenie's eyes opened wide. She felt a complete topsy-turviness in all the world. She blinked incredulously up at her father.

"The idea," said her father deliberately, "is that the people who've dropped bombs have had things their way too long. If they find we can hit back, they'll pull in their horns a bit. We're planning to use electricity again. They have to have a lesson."

KENIE rode on in a dream. She heard her father's voice. Tom and Bub babbled questions—eager, thirsty questions. Kenie heard her father say, ". . . don't have to rebuild the old generators. Simpler ways to make electricity have turned up . . ." and "couldn't conquer anybody with bombs, of course . . ." and incomprehensible things like, ". . . of course all the neighbors have known all along, but we've had to be careful...."

But Kenie was wrestling with a desperate problem of her own.

She barely heard Bub say in a tone of anguish:

"But he carried off the plane!" And then her father again, in a tone she'd never heard before—amused without any laughter in it:

"What do you think Roland flew it here for?"

Kenie's problem was unsolvable. They were coming out of the woods, and she turned appealingly to her father, but the boys had his attention. She couldn't get it. He said quietly:

"There's no secret about the bombs, but you can't fight a war with them, and who wants a war, anyhow? We want electricity—to start with. So Roland flew that plane until he knew a radar beam had touched it, and noted its speed, so they'd want to capture it instead of simply blowing it up. Then he landed it. It was risky, but it had to be done. Fortunately, it worked."

They were on the road toward home. The boys begged simultaneously:

"Was there a bomb in the plane? To go off when—"

"The plane," said Kenie's father softly, "*was* a bomb. Which will go off when they investigate its high-speed drive. When they look at it. That'll be in the middle of their workshops and laboratories, wherever they may be. There may not be many of them left.

"But anyhow there will be two hundred localities like ours all starting to use electricity on the same day, and they won't quite dare to bomb any of them because then they'll know we can now strike back."

The two boys rocked and whooped in their saddles. They shouted. Kenie's plaintive, "But what am I going to *do*?" went unheard.

They reached home, and as they dismounted in the barnyard there was a momentary feeling of insecurity underfoot. The ground seemed to tremble just a little. The barn-joists creaked and groaned. Then everything was still again. Kenie's father nodded as young faces turned quickly to him.

"Probably," he said softly. "Quite likely that was it. A few hundred miles away. They'll never know how we did it, but they won't risk trying to find out by bombing us for trying to use electricity again!"

Aloud, he said in a tired, natural voice, "Tom, I'm going to ask you to put up the horses."

Tom moved joyfully to obey. Bub leaped to help.

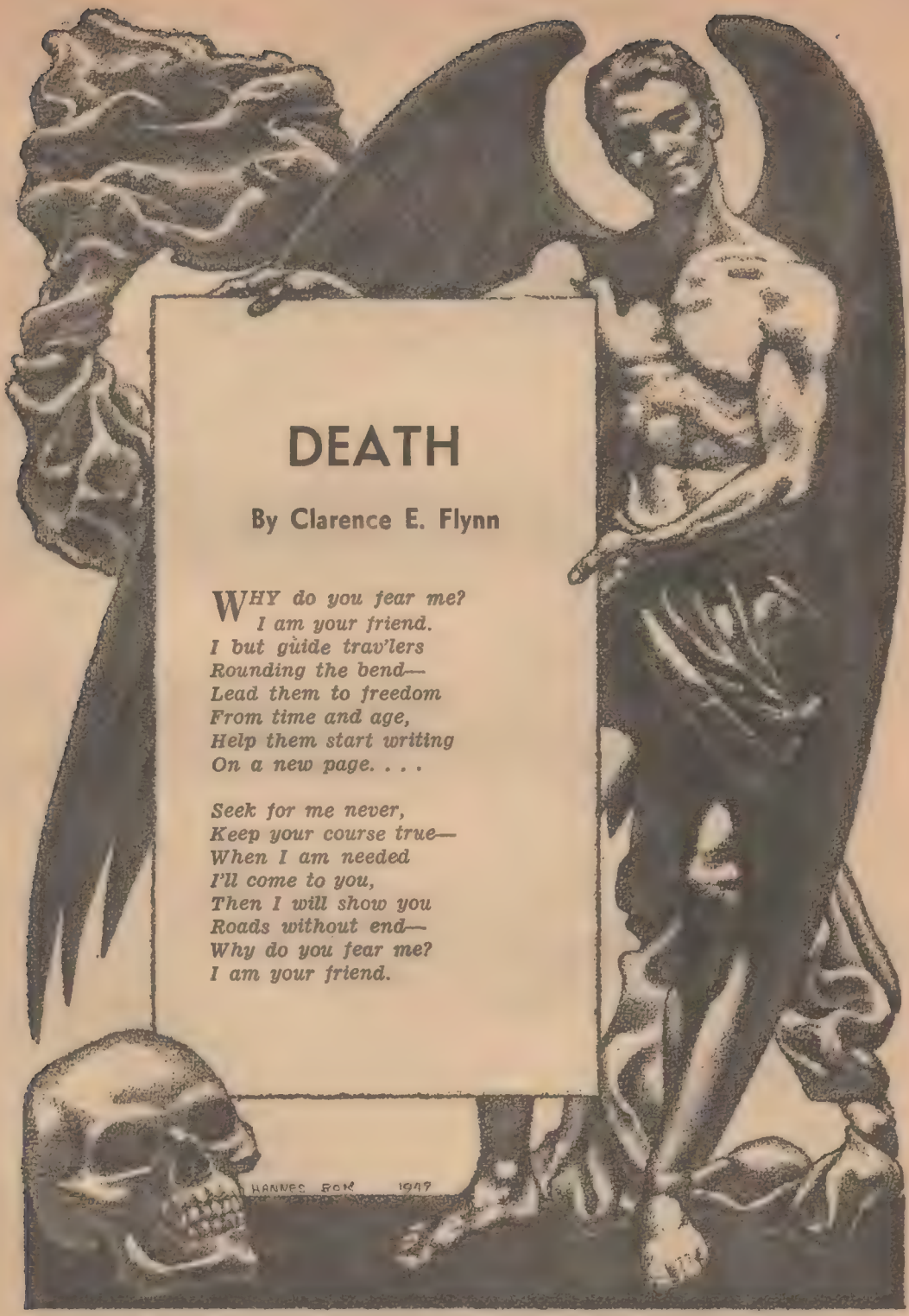
Kenie caught hold of her father's hand.

A great feat had been accomplished and the world had moved a step nearer to something more spacious and more sane. Universities and cities and television were closer.

Dread was now pushed a little farther back. The new climb of humanity was really begun.

But Kenie had a terrific problem all her own.

"Daddy!" she wailed desperately. "What can I *do*? You say I'm going to be Cissie's bridesmaid! And I haven't a thing to wear!"



DEATH

By Clarence E. Flynn

WHY do you fear me?
I am your friend.
I but guide trav'lers
Rounding the bend—
Lead them to freedom
From time and age,
Help them start writing
On a new page. . . .

Seek for me never,
Keep your course true—
When I am needed
I'll come to you,
Then I will show you
Roads without end—
Why do you fear me?
I am your friend.

The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

"VERY TOUCHING STORY"

Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading Shanks' "People of the Ruins" and can truthfully say it is the best since "25th Hour" and "Island of Captain Sparrow." I admired both Jeremy Tuft and the Old Speaker more than any other two characters in any other story. I pitied the former tremendously, and when the latter died it was rather sad. All in all, this was a very touching story.

Right here and now I would like to rate the best eight stories. Here goes:

1. "Twenty-fifth Hour." (It will be a long time before any body will equal this.)
2. "Island of Captain Sparrow." (More my type.)
3. "People of the Ruins."
4. "Star Rover." (Very interesting.)
5. "Allan and the Ice-Gods."
6. "Unthinkable." (Very good.)
7. "The Island of Dr. Moreau." (Too short.)
8. "Undying Monster," (Very well written but I don't go for this kind.)

Here's hoping you'll soon go monthly.

JAMES W. AYERS.

609 First St.,
Attalla, Ala.

ABOUT SHANKS' STORY

It is exceedingly difficult to express in words just how Ed Shanks' beautiful "People of the Ruins" affected me. The plot, though the latter part was very similar to that of Mary Mitchell's great novel, was flawless throughout. Romance, adventure, tragedy, plus suspense, combined to make a really great fantastic masterpiece.

Just what will the 21st century bring? Everything points to prosperity, advancement, a marvel age, and then we read Edward Shanks' tale. We find starvation, drudgery, barbarism, and ignorance abounds in the distant year of 2074. Oh, my.

Edward certainly wrote a tragic finish to his novel, but it created the effect it was meant to establish, on the reader, that is.

Benson's "Caterpillars"—ugh! What a horrible story that was; and Lawrence's illustration on page 117 made me feel sick—about as ill as that character appears to be, gazing down the stairway.

It seems you always place your most excellent illustration on Page 87. Golly, that pic is a beauty, especially the perspective vista in the background.

Next issue's story sounds okay. Who knows, it may be a Marvell-ous contribution.

I need the Dec. 1939 ish of F.F.M., also the April 1940, in the worst way, and any others any readers care to trade off for stf. mags. All the best in future issues.

J. J. STAMP.

Norval, Ontario, Canada

QUESTION

Edward Shanks' "The People of the Ruins" was, to my estimation, one of the best yet in your mag. I'm always afraid that you are going to "pop up" with some of this rocket, planet stuff that has been leaking into fantasy mags lately. Tell me—Science Fiction isn't considered Fantasy, is it?

To a few of us fellas out here, True Fantasy means such works as "Dracula," "The Twenty-fifth Hour," "The Ancient Allan," etc. Am I wrong?

By the way, it seems you have excluded one of the most talented writers in your mag. This name is L. Ron Hubbard. One of his best works is "Fear."

MILTON PAPAYIANIS.

Old Trails Inn,
Barstow, Calif.

Editor's Note: Pure science-fiction and pure fantasy seem to draw two distinctly different types of reader. However, they belong in the same literary classification, which might be called "out of this world" fiction, and sometimes are merged to please both types of reader. Your definition of true fantasy is correct.

SHANKS' YARN UNUSUAL

I'd like to congratulate E. Shanks on his courage in killing off both his hero and his heroine. I'm referring of course to "The People of the Ruins." That was really something unusual. I'd have liked it better if he'd never dreamed up the heroine. You'll probably disagree, but I'm a customer. Somebody said we were always right. So there. But, getting back to the story, it was similar to the Graustark stuff, but I loved it. No much fantasy, though. How about an original novel by Francis K. Allen? He's got talent, but he's wasting it on hack. And I do mean hack. Both your artists are tops. Why not let them do a cover together? How about "The Time Machine" or something else by Wells?

I'd like to hear from fans.

J. T. OLIVER.

712-32 St.,
Columbis, Georgia

VIRGINIA FANS, WRITE!

I have an idea for a Virginia science-fantasy club. Virginia does not have one, has not even

an active fan, as far as I know. Our proposed club is still in a strictly formative stage. My reason for writing this is to ask all S-F or fantasy fans in Virginia to get in touch with me or Leslie Hudson (who is my partner in this effort and a very fine fellow) in Roseland, Virginia. I'd also like to hear from any non-Virginia fans who have any comments or suggestions to offer. I don't know what turn this club idea may take, but I'm quite sure it'll be a lot of fun for all concerned; so all you Virginia fans write us!

I'll not comment on your splendid magazine, preferring to devote a complete letter to that pleasant task.

TOMMY CARTER.

817 Starling Ave.,
Martinsville, Va.

JUNE NOVEL GOOD

This is just a line to tell you that *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* is tops with me. The stories that you present are the best in their field of fiction. The drawings both for the cover and inside material are excellent pieces of art craftsmanship. I offer my congratulations to Lawrence and Finlay for the good work that they are doing.

The June story, "The People of the Ruins," registered highly with me. It is a swell story but it grows too dull in parts. Also, as the saying goes, "a hint to the wise is sufficient." Why don't you put in some more H. G. Wells stories? They make for good, all-around, reading entertainment for the fantasy lover. Another type of story I would like to see in F.F.M. is the kind that deals with ghosts and spirit mediums.

Going back past the June issue, I think that "The Star Rover" by Jack London was a superb bit of workmanship. I enjoyed it immensely. The short stories in each issue are swell.

By now I guess I've put in my two cents' worth, but here's my thanks for the swell job that you're doing.

Just keep it up.

JOHN B. JOHNSON.

2725 Shelby St.,
Dallas 4, Texas

MICHIGAN ANNOUNCEMENT

In reply to F.F.M.'s inquiry of 27 May, I'm sorry I can't give you a definite date for the first State Convention of the Michigan Fantasy Society. From the way the organization is shaping up, however, the meeting will probably be sometime in August or September.

If you can squeeze an announcement of our organization into the F.F.M. appearing 20 August, it will certainly be a great help to us. Many persons read F.F.M. who seldom scan the other fantasy and science-fiction publications.

At the moment the Michigan Fantasy Society is just being "jelled," by which I mean we are getting in touch with every Michigan fan we can locate, to find out what features they want in a fan club. Since the potential members are scattered throughout the state, there is a bit of time lag in getting any project started.

We definitely will have semi-annual State Conventions, however, and a monthly hectographed fanzine, tentatively titled *The Michi-Fan*.

Our goal is to make the Wolverine State the fantasy-fan center of the nation. (Gosh, optimistic, aren't we?)

ARTHUR H. RAPP.

2120 Bay St.,
Saginaw, Mich.

"CATERPILLARS" GOOD STORY

To be frank, I began Shanks' "People of the Ruins" with the subconscious determination that I was not going to like it. I was pleased to find myself wrong.

After reading the story, one conclusion is unavoidable: it is tremendously depressing. There is little or no humor in all of its 116 pages and the ending shows no hope whatsoever for pore li'l England. But the development is interesting and the characters are quite good. And all in all, though it isn't the best of the suspended life yarns—"Sword of Tomorrow" eclipsed it, certainly, and the greatest after-the-war tale, "The Twenty-fifth Hour" was by far its superior—I still found it a powerful novel, well worth reading.

However . . . I'm still campaigning, along with a couple thousand other guys, for more variety in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. There's an interplanetary novel, "Station X" by I don't know whom, that might satisfy the stfanatics. Taine is about due again; and this cycle of prehistoric-world's end fiction is also due—to end, I hope. "Minimum Man" sounds off the beaten track. I'll be waiting.

Read "Caterpillars" before; it's kinda cute. Its pic was the only worthwhile one in the bunch. Wish Bok had done page 87. You haven't had a really well-illustrated novel since "Boats of the *Glen Carrig*," with the exception of "The Undying Monster." The covers have been topnotch up until June 1947 and this one is pretty tough. Ah, me, the Troubles have begun (thanks, Mr. Shanks).

JOHN WALSH.

154 North Main St.,
St. Albans, Vt.

NEW GROUP

Have followed F.F.M. since its inception back in '39, except for the period during my stay in the Army, and believe that you are doing a good job in upholding the original aims of bringing hard-to-get stories within the reach of the average reader or fan. You also show a marked tendency to print what the majority asks for; within the tolerance of your editorial limits.

The only disagreeable note (except that you are not a monthly publication) is that when you embark on a type of story you keep on the same subject until it appears that the supply is inexhaustible. I am referring to these World Destruction stories which have appeared recently. A little variety would be much more pleasant.

It seems to be fashionable, when writing a letter, to recommend a long list of stories for future publication. First, I'd like to go negative and vote against any Lovecraft or H. G. Wells, as both of these have been fairly extensively published elsewhere. I would much rather see something by C. L. Moore, H. R. Haggard, or Taine, instead.

If anyone is interested in trading, I have some copies of F.F.M., F.N., and others which I will trade for certain issues of *Unknown*, F.F.M., Current Arkham House books or Fantasy Press books.

Incidentally, you might be interested in the fact that since I first started collecting magazines back in '33 this is my first fan letter to any professional publication. Also, of the current magazines, F.F.M. is one of three books I bother to collect.

We have the start of a group of S-F fans, here, which we hope to be able to expand. The members include Charles Tanner, the author, whom old time S-F readers will surely remember.

Anyone interested who lives in the Cincinnati area, drop a card to

DONALD E. FORD.

Box 332,
Sharonville, Ohio

F. F. M. NOVELS ARE TOPS

Have been a reader of your magazine for a long time. It is in my opinion the best on the market. Your selection of novels is excellent as well as the covers. I would like very much to get in touch with any fans who have any back numbers of *Fantastic Novels* or F.F.M. that they would like to exchange. Like many others, I missed quite a few issues due to Army service, having spent four years overseas. I promise to answer all letters. Once again, may I say that your novels are tops in all ways? Keep up the good work.

JOHN TAGGART.

4 Durgin St.,
Rochester, N. Y.

F. F. M. PERFECT

The first thing I do upon receiving my copy of F.F.M. is to turn to The Readers' Viewpoint.

I read the note Trover Hall sent you and I immediately sat down and wrote this letter to correct one of the statements.

Trover Hall is not the first publishing house to deal in original novels only.

We, "The New Collectors Group" were the first to publish original mss. and are continuing to publish nothing but original mss.

Should anyone desire any further information, I will be glad to supply it upon receipt of a card sent to me.

May I add that I've read F.F.M. since the first issue and I find no fault except one, and that is, it should be a monthly publication. Thanks for many pleasant hours of fantasy reading.

MARTIN GREENBERG.

421 Claremont Parkway,
New York 57, N. Y.

GRATEFUL

By the time this is printed in the Readers' Viewpoint, the first issue of the new fanzine I am publishing will be ready for distribution. I am calling it the *Burroughs Bulletin*. It will be the first time, I believe, that a fanzine has ever been published that will deal with the works of one author.

The mag will contain articles about Edgar Rice Burroughs, his writings, various motion pictures adopted from E.R.B. books, and the actors who have played in them. Just everything that concerns this great author and his works and character.

I thought it was about time all of us Burroughs fans got together and had a publication of our own—and be able to share our knowledge of Mr. Burroughs' works with each other. So all E.R.B. fans who are interested, please let me hear from you. All ideas and suggestions will be appreciated.

Still waiting for F.F.M. to go monthly and for *Fantastic Novels* to make its reappearance. How about an F.F.M. quarterly? Each issue dedicated to a certain author. We could then have a Merritt issue, Lovecraft, Kline, Wells, Haggard, and of course Burroughs issues. Each issue could contain a biography about the author to whom it's dedicated. Wouldn't it be swell? The first issue dedicated to A. Merritt, containing "The Ship of Ishtar," "Woman of the Wood," "Old Trinity Churchyard," and a list of all the author's published works.

F.F.M. is one mag that really tries to give its readers what they want. You can be sure we are all grateful for this—I know I am.

The figures in the Finlay cover for "People of the Ruins" reminds me of Frederic March and Norma Shearer in "Smilin' Thru." Did the artist by an chance use these players as models?

VERNELL CORIELL.

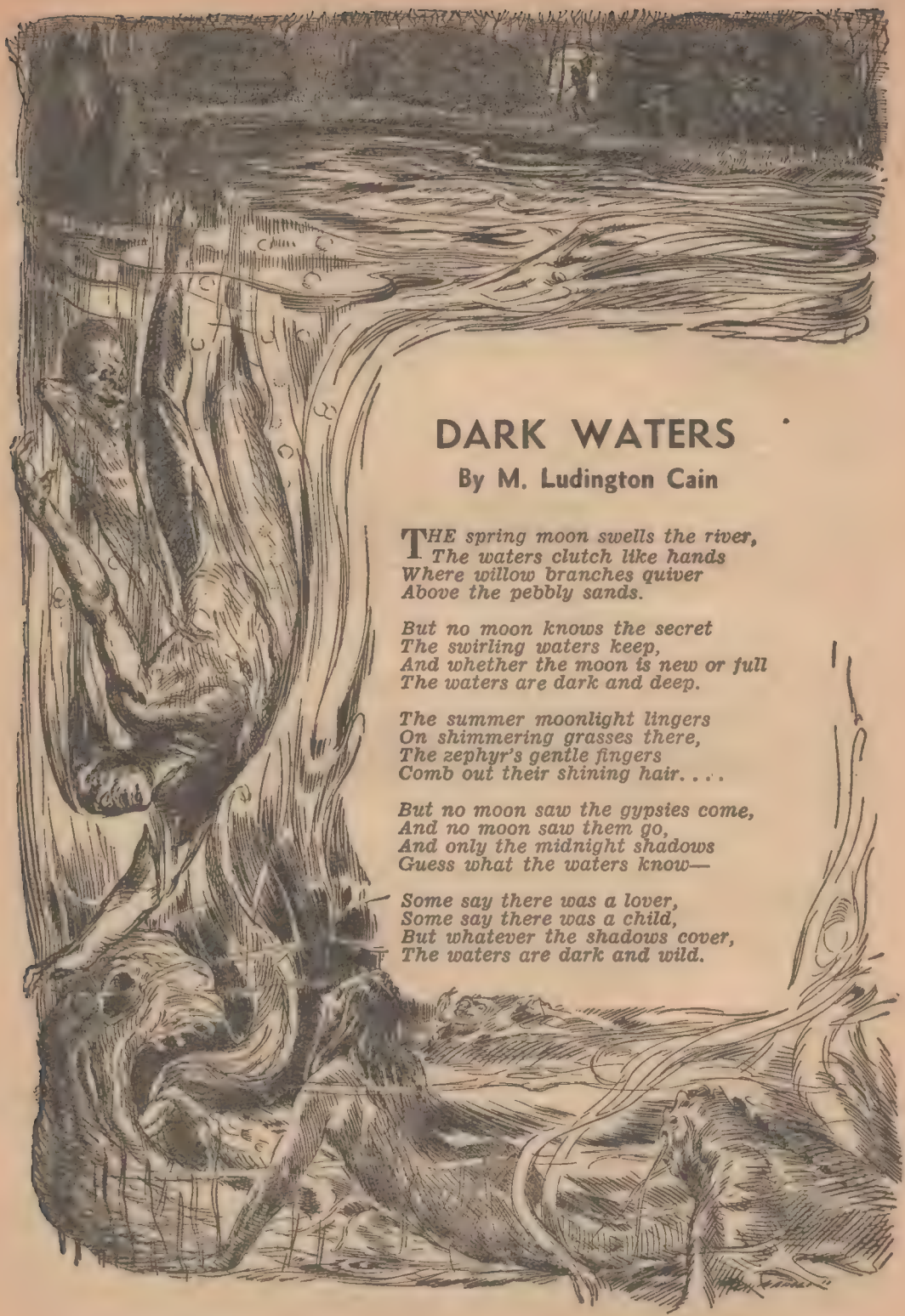
Box 78,
Manito, Ill.

NEEDS APRIL F. F. M.

Having purchased and read the June issue of F.F.M., I herewith come out of my hiding and will proceed to state my opinions concerning same. Firstuvall, the cover, while having the merit of a beautiful color scheme, was rather poor. It lacked the over all effect that it should have had, and instead became a disconnected group of nicely painted objects. The man on the cover, however, had the handsomest kisser that I've ever witnessed in a painting. I'll bet Finlay could do a bang up job on "The Picture of Dorian Gray." It is too bad that this story is so easy to get, for it would be swell for your mag. But getting back to the cover, I would like to say that Finlay can do much better. As a matter of fact, so can Lawrence. Have him do a cover again. (I missed the April ish, so I don't know if he appeared then or not). Please, by all means, don't let Finlay shove Lawrence off the cover. Rather alternate between them.

Turning to the stories, I am glad to say that

(Continued on page 112)



DARK WATERS

By M. Ludington Cain

THE spring moon swells the river,
The waters clutch like hands
Where willow branches quiver
Above the pebbly sands.

But no moon knows the secret
The swirling waters keep,
And whether the moon is new or full
The waters are dark and deep.

The summer moonlight lingers
On shimmering grasses there,
The zephyr's gentle fingers
Comb out their shining hair. . . .

But no moon saw the gypsies come,
And no moon saw them go,
And only the midnight shadows
Guess what the waters know—

Some say there was a lover,
Some say there was a child,
But whatever the shadows cover,
The waters are dark and wild.

(Continued from page 110)

"People of the Ruins" was excellent, though you really are running too many stories of this type of late. I join the other s.f. fans in a plea for a science-fiction story, though it does not have to be of the interplanetary type. Perhaps something by H. G. Wells. Shanks' story, though in reality an s.f. story, was not strictly the type that I mean, although it would have been appreciated more if the stories of late had not been so much like it.

The short story, "Caterpillars," was the typical F.F.M. short, being nicely written, but poorly plotted. It was exactly like the "Spectre Spiders." Get out of the rut, please. There are some really good short stories worth reprinting, if you would only take the trouble to look for them. Perhaps something by Lovecraft, if you can find any non mag shorts.

Now for the readers' page. First, I second the nomination for McClary's "Rebirth." I've read this, and it's a gem. Give it a try. However, in the same letter (by Chick Derry) we find a blast at Merritt. It seems that Merritt is accused of being boring, and that he rehashes his plots from other stories. Well, Mr. Derry, has it ever occurred to you that when Merritt wrote those stories, he was being original, the stories which *you* think of as the originals are probably the newer rehashes of Merritt's work. As for being boring, perhaps you should reread them when you are older. As for Lovecraft, that is more debatable. Personally, I'm for him. But so much for that. Oh, yes, Mr. Derry cited "Dracula" as a werewolf tale. It was, I believe, a vampire story. There is a vast difference.

Concerning the interior illustrations, I would like say that they are below par. Don't overwork Lawrence, as that is a sure way to cause artists to go sloppy, which Lawrence has been doing lately. However, his pics for 87 and 21 are superb, and certainly better than Finlay has done for you.

In closing, I would like to say that your mag is terrific, but please give us a little more variety. As for the art work, you probably realize that a picture taking last place in F.F.M. would probably be praised in another publication.

One more thing: I seem to have missed the April issue of F.F.M., so anyone having one, please write. I will more than appreciate it.

JACK CLEMENTS.

6310 Madison Rd.,
Cincinnati 27, Ohio

ONE OF THE GIRLS SPEAKS UP

Having purchased and read from cover to cover, the April issue of F.F.M. I decided to write and add my small feminine voice to those of your many other readers.

There seem to be only a few Canadians writing in and also only a few of the fair sex. Perhaps the latter are all like myself. I enjoy your magazine, but never get enough courage to pen a missive perhaps destined for the waste-basket?

I thoroughly enjoyed the long novel, "Allan and the Ice-Gods." I've read a lot of Haggard's stuff. I really like most of his stories. I liked "Prisoner in Time" but didn't care for "Passeur." In the Readers' Viewpoint I particularly noticed a letter from Robert J. Smith, Fort Snelling, Minn. He mentiones the weird tales the Japanese have. Having read some, I agree with his view. They certainly left me with a feeling of unholy horror. A book called "Green Willow and Other Tales" was in our Public Library. It's supposed to be Japanese Fairy Tales. And when I was about ten, I took it home and read it. Brrr! what spine-tingling chills.

I thought perhaps it was just childish imagination, but I got it again out of curiosity a couple of years ago and it still affected me the same way. I've read a few others since then, and they were just as bad. I like stories about other dimensions, also supernatural ones that leave you guessing and make you think such things mayhap could really be. I buy all the fantasy magazines in my quest. Sometimes I am rewarded, too. I guess I should make a comment on the cover and inside illustrations as everyone else seems to. What earthly connection the cover had with the novel is beyond me except for the ice and the caveman. They were both in the story. As for the ice-maiden all I can say is "M-m-m—wish I had a figure like that!" Finlay's illustrations fit in with my imaginings whilst reading the story. The one labeled Ronald Clyne was sort of odd.

EDEE MAY.

451 No. 5 Rd. RR No. 2
Vancouver, B. C.

MORE ABOUT "THE STAR ROVER"

F.F.M. has been deservedly lauded for publishing Jack London's "The Star Rover." It is F.F.M.'s policy of reprinting *literature* that has caused me to grudgingly admit to my fellow Fantasy-fans that some pulps can be worthwhile.

Furlong's question, in this department "Is it true?" would be childish if asked about most fantasy. However, this story is undoubtedly based on London's own experiences when he was jailed for vagrancy at Niagara Falls. In Irving Stone's book, "Sailor on Horseback," he writes about London: "He saw prisoners throw fits, go mad, be whipped down eight tiers of stone steps, be beaten to death. He came to know hundreds of men, to hear their stories, to grasp their philosophies." I recommend this biography highly to those who enjoyed "The Star Rover." (Doubleday & Co., Inc., N.Y.C.) There is a condensation in *Readers Digest*, February, 1947.

Chalk me up on the side of Horror and Weird, and Fantasy. I frankly don't read F.F.M. unless the novel is a classic in the border sense of literature, and/or weird. I haven't time. What little time I get for reading goes these days to Japanese fantasy—concentrating on weird—of which there is a rich store little known to Americans. If any of your readers happen also to enjoy this obscure field of the hobby, I should like to hear from them.

HELEN V. WESSON.

Textile Division, ESS, GHQ SCAP Tokyo,
APO 500, San Francisco, Calif.

NO BLOOD-CURDLERS, PLEASE

I have been a subscriber to F.F.M. almost from the beginning, and have every issue of the magazine, and its companion of old, F.N. Of all the long stories that have been published since it changed hands, I have enjoyed "The Lost Continent" and "The Ancient Allan" and "The Undying Monster" most. Of all the others, there are a few that I enjoyed, some that were extremely dull, and some so downright disgusting that I will surely never read them again. A really good story can be read several times, and not lose its savor, don't you agree?

Please, let's have more Fantasy and less Weird. To be fantastic a story need not curdle your blood, and we have had too many like that.

I thoroughly enjoyed the art work by Finlay and Lawrence. Some of the covers, and inside pics also, have been so delicately beautiful. I prefer these to the skeletal hands, and bony faces.

I have the following books which I would be willing to part with if anyone is interested. "The Purple Sapphire"—Taine; "The Babyons"—Clemence Dane; "Dracula"—Bram Stoker; "Brood of the Witch Queen"—Sax Rohmer; "A Traveler in Time"—Uttley; "The Landslide"—Gilbert.

Oh, yes, I have an extra copy of F.F.M., February 1947.

I wish you the best of luck.

Olive V. Wendling.

Morocco, Ind.

PLEASED WITH F. F. M. STORIES

If "The Slayer of Souls" has been published in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, would it be possible to get a copy? There have been no F.F.M. books in here for the last four months, so I missed it.

I have been reading the magazine for a long time. I wish to put in a plea to some of the readers for the magazines containing the following stories: "Face in the Abyss"; "Snake Mother"; "Moon Pool"; "Conquest of the Moon Pool"; "Lost World"; "The Land That Time Forgot."

I am very pleased with the stories in F.F.M. and would like to see more by Jack London and Chambers. I am not much on this letter writing but would like to have the mentioned stories that I had read years ago. I hardly ever see a woman's name in your column of Readers' Viewpoint.

Mrs. Gladys Tannler.

Box 976,
Port Angeles, Wash.

Editor's Note: We have not used "The Slayer of Souls" as yet.

OFFER

Please print this plea for back isues of F.F.M. magazines.

I have them back to June '44. I have read F.F.M. for years, and had a large number of them, but gave them to the girl scouts who were collecting them for the servicemen during the war.

I have five copies of '46 F.F.M. magazines, December, February, April, June and October. I am willing to trade.

Here's wishing F.F.M. success. And a long, long life.

Thelma Clay.

P. O. Box 123,
Kimball, West Va.

OFFER

Those who follow the Readers' Viewpoint may be interested in some of my large supply of back numbers of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. I can also supply back numbers of other fantasy and science fiction magazines running back into the middle 20's.

I would be glad to hear from interested readers what back numbers they require.

Jane Stokes.

1614 Riggs Pl. N. W.,
Washington, D. C.

CAN YOU TELL HER?

I read in the June issue of F.F.M. that some of Rider Haggard's books are difficult to get.

I have a copy of "The Pearl Maiden" and would appreciate any information as to its rarity as I would like to sell it.

Mrs. Leona Stellman.

113 Pierce St.,
San Francisco 17, Calif.

UNMINCED WORDS

May I submit what doubtless will be a minority report on the June F.F.M.? Being first and foremost a science-fictionist, I was pleased to note that you were following London's and Haggard's recent offerings with "The People of the Ruins," another novel which has often been mentioned as a "stf classic" by fantasy collectors. However, I was not so pleased after reading Edward Shanks' story. Having at last delivered us from the "ghoulies and ghosties and things that bo-o-o-mp i' the night," you presently seem bent on doing away with all science-fictionists by a subtler means. You have made F.F.M. a veritable time machine with trips backward in time strictly limited to those terminating in the Stone Age, and journeys forward only to the era of Our Barbarous Descendants. Your hope seems to be that stf addicts will glut themselves on this monotonous fare and be happy and glad to return to vampires, werewolves, and clutching hands.

Well, "The People of the Ruins" was almost enough to make this science-fictionist toss in the towel and scream for more "Draculas" and "Undying Monsters." Not only does Shanks' ineffectual hero pull a hackneyed "Rip van Winkle," but when he emerges from his suspended animation, he runs smack into the same old Barbarians of Tomorrow who have peopled too many stf stories of late to be (a) terrifying, (b) picturesque, or (c) interesting—at least to me.

Furthermore, in order not to strain credulity too far, one must assume that "The People of

the Ruins" took place, not in our world, but in a parallel one branching off from ours *circa* 1920. For, after all, while England *did* have a General Strike (in 1926) it was certainly not the beginning of such a shambles as Shanks predicted. In fact, it was quite orderly and entirely bloodless.

I termed this letter a "minority report" because I anticipate that most everyone will acclaim "The People of the Ruins." The novel *was* well-written, although the characterization, with the single exception of The Speaker (the one person of the ruins I'll remember), remained somewhat nebulous. I liked the way the story ended, too, a "sad" ending being in keeping with the despairing mood of the tale. However, as I say, the "civilization destroyed" theme has been elaborated upon too often of late, and in comparison with many other yarns based on that idea, "The People of the Ruins" was distinctly second-rate.

May I suggest that if the "future disaster" type of fantasy is to be featured that you obtain R. C. Sherriff's magnificent "The Hopkins Manuscript" for early publication? This novel, too, is excellently written, and has the distinction of employing a more unusual method of destroying civilization than that used in "Unthinkable," "The Twenty-fifth Hour," etc. Really, it is a topnotch story and worthy of magazine publication.

Another possibility is the novel "Gay Hunter" —and I am surprised that you haven't given this to us already, because it is by G. Leslie Mitchell, author of "Three Go Back." This is another "degenerate future" tale, but like "The Hopkins Manuscript," it is more thought-provoking and more fantastic than your recent selections in this line. If we must have the type, let's have some good ones.

Otherwise, I'd like to see more of John Taine's work, particularly "The Purple Sapphire" and "Green Fire," the latter being the fastest moving and in some ways the most interesting of his works. And for something equally off-trail (at least for the present-day F.F.M.) I'd enjoy seeing you print "Land Under England" by Joseph O'Neill, and "General Manpower" by John S. Martin. Martin's yarn is intriguing enough to warrant the revising it would need to omit—or to alter the identities of—such strange characters as "Mussolini" and a maniac named "Hitler."

E. F. Benson's story, "Caterpillars," this issue was good enough, if one likes that sort of thing. I don't.

Except for his production on Page 65, Lawrence's pix were mere full-page blots of ink. Finlay's cover was good. What ever happened to Frank R. Paul? His illustrations in many of the early F.F.M.'s remain unsurpassed.

REDD BOGGS.

2215 Benjamin St. N. E.,
Minneapolis 13, Minn.

LIKES THE LONG STORIES

I have just finished reading Haggard's "Allan and the Ice-Gods," and I think it's even better than "The Ancient Allan." If there are other such stories by Haggard (except "She," which is too easily obtained) please print them, but with intervals between for other types of novels for variety. I am glad to see Finlay back; most of his illustrations were excellent, but some were not so good. Lawrence provided a beautiful cover, as usual, but I don't see what situation in the story it was taken from.

I have never heard of "People of the Ruins" before, but, then, I hadn't heard of several novels you've printed till I read them in the magazine, and I liked them none the less. So I trust in your judgment. Don't let me down.

I have a considerable number of fantasy books, some bound and some pocketbooks, to be disposed of, including books by Dunsany, Lovecraft, Wells, and A. Merritt. Write for details enclosing postal card, if interested.

Please don't ever publish an all short-story issue, as some fellows have suggested, because I only tolerate the short stories, most of which I don't like, for the sake of the long ones.

BILL UNDERWOOD.

Box 14, Wilson Center,
Norman, Okla.

HIS FAVORITE MAG, BUT . . .

As an opening for this epistle, I should like to thank you for printing my letter in "The Readers' Viewpoint." It was indeed an honor to see it published in F.F.M.

"The People of the Ruins" was, unfortunately, a let-down as far as I am concerned. The beginning, up to the second chapter, seemed somewhat archaic and tarnished. Had it been published in any other magazine but F.F.M. I would have probably quit. However, such was not the case, and I read on.

I feared, and with good reason, that it was to be just another "fall-of-civilization" theme. But then along came the time-travel episode, and things seemed a wee bit brighter. Variations, for a change, you see.

Would that the author had let his Jeremy sleep on for a few thousand years more; the plot might have been more fantastic, and thusly suited more to the tastes of F.F.M. fans. But that was not to be. From thereon in, it was simply another re-hash of the "civilization destroyed!" plot. With, for a change, a tragic ending. It had not the power nor the suspense of "The Twenty-fifth Hour," nor of Wright's "Deluge." That makes two poor novels of all I've read in F.F.M. The other was Hodgson's frightful mess, "Boats of the *Glen Carrig*." Not a bad record at all, but still, with the vast store of stories you have to choose from . . .

The short story was another very poor choice for our mag. "Caterpillars" is available in almost every weird anthology ever published. Why not some rare stories from "The King in Yellow," or its sequel, "Maker of Moons"?

Aside from that, the tale neither succeeded in thrilling or scaring me at all. Not even one teeny bit.

Shame.

The fantastic mood is fast escaping your mag as far as art goes. Symbolism, symbolism. Even the best symbolic drawings become tiresome after a while. The cover was clear and well done, but in the story the gal wasn't de-

scribed as a maiden out of the late nineteenth century.

I, too, like R. R. Anger, would like to see some more science fiction in the pages of F.F.M. Some of your most popular stories published, aside from Merritt's fantasies, were of this nature. "The Blind Spot," "The Spot of Life," and so on.

Such wonderful extravaganza should not, by any means, be neglected.

Future suggestions. Paul on covers. Because on his detail and imagination he can't be beat. Stories:

"Scarlet Empire" by Parry, "Green Eyes of Bast"—Rohmer, "Last and First Men" trilogy—Stapledon, "The World Below"—Wright. Anything by my favorite, Haggard.

I know, this letter sounds as though I'm mad or something, but you are my favorite mag, and I'm not.

Good luck!

Your friend, fan-tasteek,

B. De Revere.

356 St. Paul's Ave.,
Stapleton 4,
Staten Island, N. Y.

"UNDYING MONSTER" FAN

Having just finished the Readers' Viewpoint for the April issue, and seeing so many criticisms of the stories for 1946, thought I might as well join in. In my opinion it was the poorest year for F.F.M. The only story I can enjoy reading again is "The Undying Monster." I have already read it over three times. The February issue for this year, though it has a beautiful cover, does not appeal to me, either. Jack London as a fantastic writer does not compare with his other stories.

Coming back to the April issue, it is a welcome change. I enjoyed "Allan and the Ice-Gods" though I am not so fond of primitive man stories. I think Pag the dwarf was the most interesting character. He certainly had the most brains. The cover would have been beautiful if without the skeleton hand. I do hope the next issue isn't one of those end of civilization stories with people turning back into beasts and preying on one another. I am very tired of them. Isn't there any story that hasn't appeared in magazine form, about another planet?

I sure would like to see one of those in F.F.M. again.

I see where one fan wants "Andivius Hedulio" by White. That book hasn't anything fantastic about it. A magnificent adventure story but certainly not fantastic.

Why can't F.F.M. have smooth edges again? Some of my copies are getting mussed around the edges.

For magazines that you want to throw away after reading, rough edges are all right but not for my favorite mag. Here's hoping for better stories in 1947 and no more bony hands and skulls on the covers.

The best of luck.

P. H. Malone.

R. 1 Box 577,
Eureka, Calif.

SUGGESTIONS

Just received my copy of the June F.F.M. with Finlay's gruesome "Barrett's of Wimpole Street" cover. Never expected to see Freddy March and Norma Shearer on the cover of our mag. Ye gads, you'd think Finlay would have some professional pride without swiping old movie stills for inspiration. That Vic Mature, Carole Landis cover for "Beyond the Great Oblivion" should have been the "handwriting on the wall."

Lawrence's illustration for "Caterpillars" saved the art department this issue.

Glad to see "Minimum Man" coming up; it should make a great hit with the fans. It is truly a complimentary story for F.F.M.

Again I'd like to make a plea for Francis Sibson's "The Survivors"; which I think is 100 per cent better than "Unthinkable."

Another thriller that I think would be a hit —"Land Under England," with its vivid word pictures of that subterranean land of darkness and horror.

If you have the opportunity I would suggest that you read "The Private Life of Henry Perkins" by John Murray Reynolds, a recent (1947) publication of the Crowell Co. It compares favorably with your style, and while perhaps too new for now—would be a good future prospect. It concerns the hen-pecked Henry Perkins and his fantastic dreams brought about by an ancient coin from Atlantis (?). A touching and extremely interesting story.

O. G. Estes, Jr.

Box 33,
Randolph Field, Texas

LIKED JUNE COVER

Finlay's cover on the June issue was again superb. It reminds me a lot of his older work. Thanks again for publishing my letter in the last issue. I met a lot of swell correspondents through it. The way the mail came in, my wife thought this address was a post office.

Lawrence did some beautiful work in the June issue. The art is still tops in your mag.

Jack Roberts.

69 Erie St.,
Tiffin, Ohio.

INTERESTED IN BACK ISSUES?

If consistent with your editorial policy, will you please announce in your letters from readers column that I have on hand for whoever is interested:

Famous Fantastic Mysteries: Feb., Apr., June, Aug., Oct., Dec. 1946—Feb., Apr., June 1947.

Fantastic Adventures: Feb., May, July, Sept. (2 copies), Nov. 1946—Jan., March (2 copies), May, July (2 copies) 1947.

Astounding Science Fiction: Jan. 1946 through "to date."

One (1) copy each, in paper cover edition: Metal Monster; The Lost God; Avon Fantasy Reader; Bk. 1 & Bk. 2.

Weird Tales: Jan., March, May, July, Sept., Nov. 1946—Jan., March, May, July 1947.

Amazing Stories: Dec. 1945—May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. 1946—Jan., Feb., Apr., May, June, July 1947.
Planet Stories: Spring, Summer, Fall 1946—Fall 1947.
Startling Stories: March, Spring, Summer, Fall 1946—Jan. (2 copies), March, May, July 1947.
Thrilling Wonder Stories: Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall, Dec. 1946—Feb., Apr., June 1947.

ROBERT J. HYATT.

P. O. Box 905,
West Palm Beach, Florida.

OFFER

It is such a race to get a copy of F.F.M. at the local newsstand that I am enclosing a check for a year's subscription. O.K.

I would like to recommend for future publication an old story by Ben Ames Williams called "The Powder of Midas." If my memory serves me right it appeared as a serial in *Argosy-All Story* over twenty-five years ago.

I have been a collector of fantasy and science fiction books for many years. I have in my collection about one hundred duplicates and I would like to dispose of many of them. Among these are several Mundys (including the scarce "Hundred Days" and "The Woman Ayisha"), Chambers' "Slayer of Souls," Drake's "The Shadowy Thing," G. A. England's "Cursed," Kline's "Maza of the Moon," Taine's "Before the Dawn," Doyle's "Maracot Deep," and several Dunsanys.

Among those I would like to obtain are "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," "Out of Space and Time," "Someone in the Dark," Taine's "Iron Star" and "Purple Sapphire," England's "Darkness and Dawn" and others.

I will be glad to send to anyone interested a complete list of what I have.

SUMNER B. MYERS.

904 So. Forest Ave.,
Ann Arbor, Mich.

FOR COLLECTORS

I have a complete file of science, weird, and fantasy magazines to dispose of, beginning with the June-July 1938 issues and running through 1944.

All are in perfect condition, most of them having been trimmed to preserve them.

Inasmuch as I no longer have room enough for such a large amount of magazines, I have decided to dispose of them at this time, with the hope that I can find a fan or fans who would appreciate my collection. I have gained much information as well as many enjoyable hours from all the science and fantasy fiction I've read, and I should like to pass this on to someone who will gain as much from it or more.

If possible, I would prefer to hear from or see fans in the New England area. In that way they could see what they were getting and arrange with me for safe transportation of the mags.

I wish you much deserved success with F.F.M. and I hope that it will continue to grow bigger and better in every way. Thank you for your cooperation. I would prefer to sell in complete sets wherever possible.

WAYLAND KLINE.

Copley Advertising Agency,
457 Stuart St.,
Boston 16, Mass.

EX-SOLDIER NEEDS MAGS

I would appreciate greatly your publishing this letter in your next issue. I need five copies of F.F.M. to round out my collection. I've been a fan since the beginning of your mag, but missed out on several issues as I was inducted into the Army in March 1941. The issues I'm missing are August 1941, February 1942, June, 1942, June, 1943, all F.F.M. Also, the issue of *Fantastic Novels* containing "The Dwellers in the Mirage."

I will trade the following issues which are much scarcer as they all preceded the above mentioned:

F.F.M.: November 1939, March 1940, April 1940.
F.N.: January 1941.

Also four issues of *Argosy* containing "Seven Footprints to Satan," only one part missing—Part II. All the above are in good condition, but the March 1940 issue has the front cover missing.

B. WELDT.

785 Blake Ave.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

OUR ARTISTS THE FINEST

Since I have enjoyed your magazine for several years now I thought that it was about time I cast a few laurels where they're due.

As a connoisseur of art and illustration I should like to commend first the covers of your magazine. I think they are the finest in the Science-Fiction-Fantasy field. Lawrence seems to improve with every cover he draws while Finlay seems to have grown lax in the last one or two years. He doesn't draw the beautifully intricate illustrations he formerly did. He drew swell covers about 1942, especially the April issue illustrating Ralph Milne Farley's "Radio Planet and the Ant Men."

For anyone who is interested in back issues of Fantasy or Science-Fiction mags I have several hundred I am prepared to give up. Those who would care to obtain particulars can drop me a card. My collection contains selections from about every popular publication in this field.

GLENN STOCKUM.

RFD #4,
Coshocton, Ohio.

IF YOU ARE UNDER FOURTEEN . . .

The first F.F.M. I read was "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*." Since then I have read F.F.M. constantly and enjoyed the best Fantasy on the market. The latest issues I've enjoyed are: "Phra the Phoenician," "The Ancient Allan," "The Star Rover," and "Allan and the Ice-Gods." Please print more Haggard, and also some Burroughs. I also would like to see some of Bram Stoker, and Sax Rohmer, in F.F.M.,

and also would some readers who are under 14 please correspond with me? I hope your next issues will be as good as the last. I'll close by congratulating you on your high-class mag.

DONALD ADAMS.

312 Huron Ave.,
Bogalusa, La.

A LITTLE BIT CRITICAL

F.F.M. used to rate #1 on my reading list, as the only magazine that came anywhere near enjoyment perfection. It had the very best of fantasy, real fantasy, which is mighty hard to find. It had variety in its offering and it had the best illustrations to be found in any pulp. Now it has slipped way down on all counts.

For the past four months there's been very little fantasy in the novels—and while I enjoy adventure stories, I don't look for them in your magazine. As for the variety—everything seems to be the world in ruins theme. Finlay's drawings for some of the shorts were good, but those for Haggard's novel were pretty bad. And Lawrence's for "The People of the Ruins" are little better. Both men can do some fine work. Here's hoping to see them do so. As for the number of illustrations used: I'd sooner see the editors chop most of the story out than cut down the pix. There reprints of British fantastics are all overwritten, anyway. Some editing would do them good.

As for authors—my acquaintance with them is only through F.F.M. or the old *Argosy*. Of these I like S. Fowler Wright, Cutcliffe Hyne, and Edward Arnold. If you have any unused Burroughs stories, they'll do. Since you don't reprint magazine classics, that's about all. Haggard's all right, too.

John Taine doesn't appeal, nor do I rate Sibson too highly. You seem to be satisfying a good many readers, judging by the readers' reports. Maybe I'm a lone griper. If so, ignore me.

Thank you for your time. It seems readers' opinions don't really carry too much weight, but I hope there's enough to persuade you to go back to more profuse illustrations—and more variety in the fiction.

GEORGE EVANS.

659 Franklin Ave.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

WANTED: GIESY ITEM

I would like to know if anyone has for me the *All-Story Weekly* Magazine that contained J. U. Giesy's story "Jason, Son of Jason."

RICHARD ALAN MCLELLAN.

2924 No. 58 St.,
Omaha, Neb.

DISAPPOINTED

For the past several years I have rushed to the newsstands when came the time for F.F.M., plunked down my quarter, rushed back home, and promptly died away into another world. What did I do this month? You guessed it. I did exactly as I've always done before. But—woe is me—I was doomed to disappointment. I hadn't read thirty minutes before I'd decided I had wasted part of my quarter. Please, Mr. Editor, won't you explain to me why you had to foul up such a good mag with so smelly a yarn as "The People of the Ruins"? Mr. Shanks has made himself into a veritable futuristic Zane Grey with so many pages of description and no action. Imagine, if you can, anyone getting excited over a bunch of old men shooting a gun. Phooey—and phooey again. By the time I managed to wade through that story I was ready to give this issue up as a lost crusade.

However, I've always tried to be fair to everyone and you still had a chance at redemption, so I waded some more. More phooeys. Mr. Benson (I'll say this for him) did not wax so eloquent on descriptions, but he picked an idea that I heard of almost by the time I was out of my cradle.

So—I've come to this conclusion. If Mr. Shanks and Mr. Benson can make a living with their stories, I should be able to become a millionaire. I wonder—I believe I could. By golly, I think I'll try it. Be on the lookout for a story from me some time. In the meantime, pul-leeze, Mr. Editor, don't disappoint me again.

JAMES E. BLACK.

Box 1,
Evandale, Texas.

PLEA FOR BACK ISSUES

Someone began a recent letter to you with, "Having purchased the Finaly cover"—(apologies to John Walsh); so please allow me to do the same, substituting Lawrence for Finlay. Lawrence is every bit as good as Finlay, especially on your covers. Lawrence's skull and figures were much better than Finlay's. However, since I admire Finlay very much, allow me to give him five stars on his "Star Rover" cover (no pun).

Having brought up the subject of London's classic, comments shall follow. London was a genius, though sometimes a wayward one, and his writings show it. But I don't think "The Star Rover" had enough fantasy in it to uphold the standard of "Before the Dawn." It was better, in my inexpert opinion than "Unthinkable," which was a very good tale of adventure.

Which brings me up to another fine yarn. For one man to have written so many truly great tales seems highly improbable, but H. Rider Haggard seems to have done it. While it seems from reports that "The Ancient Allan" and "Allan and the Ice-Gods" are not his best, they are very, very good. But before you go patting yourself on your well-padded back, I'll quickly add that neither approach the excellence of "Greatest Adventure." Maybe it's because this is the first of your stories that I read, which allowed it to crash unexpectedly into my inexperienced brain, or because Taine's tale is a truly great classic, I don't know; but I do know that I enjoyed it more than any of your others, which include "Golden City" which I obtained from P.F.C. Shlivek of Brooklyn (Where's that?).

Now, with a deep breath, I'd like to throw myself into the literary battle that seems to rage through the pages of your Readers' Viewpoint—namely, that you are giving us too many "World Finis" "Lost Race" and horror stories, and that too many of your covers show too many flesh-absented fingers and heads (human).

May I add my pen to the increasing ranks of those who present this view? At least half your letters in the April ish give this opinion, yet your next story "The People of the Ruins" seems to be the same type. How about that? Please give us another of those great classics that filled your pre-war pages! Whasamata? Don't they write like that any more? That is, anybody but Taine? A word about your interior illustrations. At least I see why everyone raves about Clyne—he's different! Lawrence and Finlay are slightly alike in their technique. And good! Here's my opinion of the best interior of the last three issues. Lawrence's moonlit horror on page 114 for the "Spectre Spiders" in the Feb. ish is it. For pure drawn horror, dimly lit, this one is tops. If you don't think so now—wait—it'll grow on you. Very, very close behind it is the pen painting by Lawrence on page 21. With a border, no less.

Despite your present slump in quality, your mag still remains head and belly above any other in your field, but please, how about some true classics, full of the pathos and cosmic wonder that made your earliest stories so well remembered, and so often mentioned in your readers' letters? You can't realize the feeling of disheartening inadequacy that fills us readers of today who weren't able to read those oft mentioned epics like "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" or the Jason series. I'm trying to get these.

Would any reader care to offer information on any of them? The earliest F.F.M. I have, including "Golden City" is "Greatest Adventure," and I'd like to get back issues. Dimly I remember reading "The Day of the Brown Horde" and I'd like very much to read it again. And even if you don't have information, how about writing anyway? There are no fan clubs here, and only two other fantasy fellows anywhere near that I know of.

Thanks.

Russ Manning.

P.O. Box 1746,
Orentt, Calif.

NEED BACK ISSUES?

After having collected fantasy, weird and science fiction magazines for many years I am now forced to dispose of my collection. I am offering readers complete runs of practically all such magazines, including complete files of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels*.

If any of the readers of this magazine are interested in completing their own files I would like to have them get in touch with me and list their needs. I will reply promptly and quote prices and conditions of magazines.

Thanks a lot for your trouble, and all my best wishes for the continued success of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. Incidentally, when can we expect a revival of *Fantastic Novels?*

G. Gordon Dewey.

P. O. Box 2181,
Hollywood 28, Calif.

LOVES FANTASY

I was overjoyed to see an H. Rider Haggard story as the feature of the April F.F.M. The cover, also, was more in keeping with your reputation as publishers of the better works in the realm of fantasy. The past few covers which consisted of gibbering skulls and brooding manbeasts had a repelling effect. The April cover, aside from the icicled, skeletal hand, was very attractive. The firm that does the printing should also be complimented—very fine registration.

I've yet to read one of Mr. Haggard's stories without being captured and enthralled—from the first words until the last. As for the companion short stories—phooey! I would like to find more whimsey. Those that made H. H. Munro and A. E. Coppard famous. It would be a great delight to find, in some future issue. "The Celestial Omnibus" or "Adam And Eve And Pinch Me." Some of John Russell's stories, also fall into the field of fantasy. I'm getting tired of passage-through-time stories and psycho thrillers.

But don't get me wrong. I love fantasy.

Bernard Vogelman.

1159 E. 13 St.,
Brooklyn 30, N. Y.

A QUESTION TO ANSWER

Although this is my first letter to you, I have been an F.F.M. fan for several years. However, it has been only recently that I started my collection of your magazine. More of that later, though.

I wish to comment favorably on the February issue. "The Star Rover" was one of the best novels I have ever read. I am only sorry that Jack London did not expand more fully his hero's trips back into his subconscious memory. I am sure it would have made very much more interesting reading than the many short "trips" that were made.

Right now, I have the April issue before me, ready to delve into H. Rider Haggard's classic. Incidentally, is "Child Of Storm" (Mameena) by Haggard, a science-fiction novel? If so, I submit that to you as a next possible F. F. M. feature story. It is an "Allan Quatermain" novel, but I am not sure whether or not it was published in a magazine.

As I mentioned before, I am starting a collection of F. F. M. However, I find it difficult to get some of the earlier issues. I'd appreciate it if some of your fans would send me lists of what they have and would like to dispose of. If it will fill up the gaps on my shelf, I will promise quick response.

Thank you very much for your help.

Seth Joel Siskin.

408 Schuyler Ave.,
Elmira, N. Y.

SUPERB, COLOSSAL, ETC.!

Well, Congratulations (with a capital C) for having a *good* story for once. You put out such trash as "25th Hour" and "Unthinkable" (incidentally my thoughts on "Unthinkable" are unmentionable.)

But when you gave us "Allan And The Ice-Gods" I sat enthralled as I read it. Superb! Colossal! Magnificent! Super-hyper!

And Finlay's drawings! Superb! Colossal! Mag— Oh, well, you know.

"Prisoner In Time" was super, but why put such an excellent plot into just two pages? It could have been a short novel, at least.

"Passeur"— fair.

Say, fantasy fans, I'll trade "The 25th Hour" or "Unthinkable" (or both) for a copy of "The Ancient Allan."

Donald Lee Fox.

208 W. 7 St.,
Bicknell, Ind.

CRITICISM

I'm writing you, not because it gives me any pleasure, but because I am going to add my voice of those of Tony Raines and R. I. Martini. Yes, I am going to still further break that unblemished record of criticism. Up to now, the fact that no letters have been printed panning F. F. M. has reflected to your credit, since I believe you're fair enough to print a fair selection of letters, both bouquets and brickbats. You and another mag had the same record of no panning letters, although I don't quite know about the fairness of the other. At any rate, fair or not, I think it's about time we quit this fawning and started tearing the dickens out of you, as the two fellows I mentioned have done.

The April issue is a typical F. F. M., to a large extent. The lead novel was the usual one, 110 pages, British, and dull. The illustrations were poorer than average, some of the worst Finlay has ever done, and, believe me, that's saying plenty; even if his work has been magnificent most of the time, he has slipped mightily more than once. Lawrence's for "Passeur" would have been a beauty, but the reproduction was rotten, thus ruining the effect. F. F. M.'s illustrations have been going downhill for a long time. Much as I hate to criticize Lawrence, the pics he did for "Unthinkable" were among his poorest ones. The same goes for the Finlays in this issue. What happened to L's? Before—on "The Lost Continent" and others—he did the best art work ever seen in fantasy magazines. Now he has slipped sadly. Finlay's return in this month's novel was nothing to brag about, which is a great understatement. Wotsamatter? These guys can do magnificent work, if they try!

However, I wouldn't be writing you like this just to pan your art work. Art work doesn't make a magazine, I know darned well—look at your competitors who are high on fan lists with art work that is the poorest extant. No more than just the pics has been deteriorating. Your lead novels are getting progressively worse, more boring, more tiring. "The Star Rover" was the only break in the monotony these past months; aside from it, and maybe "The Undying Monster," we have been subjected to an endless array of end-of-the-world novels, cave man novels, and lost world, lost race novels. Talk about monotony! "The 25th Hour," "Unthinkable," now "The People of the Ruins"—and that only covers the past year; if you go further back there are more, more, more. Prehistoric novels—"Before the Dawn," now "Allan and the Ice-Gods." Lost Race novels—well, it's useless to enumerate them. Do you think that F. F. M. should limit itself to three types of novels? Your title is *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. That means more than just end of the world, cave man, and lost world stories. God knows there are hundreds of swell novels that don't belong to any of these three types. After the sickening array, to see another end of civilization novel coming in the next issue is the last straw. I doubt very much if I'll read the next F. F. M. at all. No doubt the issue after it will contain a cave man story. Ugh! . . . Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if they were good, readable stories. But no. They have to be ponderous, philosophical, dull, running far too long. "Unthinkable" wasn't even a fantasy, until Page 66. Then, after that, it was the worst fantasy ever written. "The 25th Hour" ran about fifty pages too long, and entered into far, far too much detail. "Allan and the Ice-Gods" didn't get more than started till Page 105 or so, then ended abruptly—ye gods of Holy Space! Do you pick the worst available stories, or is it just that there aren't any decent ones available?

With fond, but doubtful hopes for future issues, I remain

Don Wilson.

495 North Third St.,
Banning, Calif.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Constructive criticism is always studied with a view to the future, with us. "Allan and the Ice-Gods" was very much liked by most of F. M. M.'s readers.

HAS BACK ISSUES

I take a lot of interest in reading your correspondence column. As a matter of fact, it's the first thing I do read, usually immediately upon receiving the magazine. Your other readers seem to be a nice bunch. (Even those who didn't like "The Man Who Was Thursday.") And since there seem to be a lot of requests for and offers of magazines, I'd like to mention that I have a great many back issues of most science-fiction and fantasy magazines dating back from three to thirteen years ago which are just taking up space in my closet. I'm sticking to F.F.M. in the future, so I'll furnish a list on request. I'd also welcome any straight correspondence.

Any chance of getting some of Stapledon? And I won't complain if you run Haggard haggard in F. F. M.

Albert Metzger.

1750 Davidson Ave.,
New York 53, N. Y.

A STUDENT OF THE OCCULT

Have been a student of the Occult for many years; in fact have read nothing but metaphysical books for three years.

The story by Jack London in your March issue, "The Star Rover," was called to my attention by a great Soul. Since then I have read several back copies.

I wonder how many of your readers realize the hidden truths and so often not hidden.

Again it's the age-old saying—"Let those that have eyes—see. Those that have ears—hear."

In gratitude,
KAY KENT.

1104 E. Harvard St.,
Glendale 5, Calif.
dispose of these.

LIKES HAGGARD

After reading my first Haggard story, I sincerely hope that I will see more of them in your magazine. Other suggestions are H. G. Wells, Merritt, and John Taine.

You might inform fantasy fans who are trying to obtain back copies of fantasy and science-fiction that I have most copies of these magazines dating back to 1940 and that I am willing to dispose of these.

T. M. Lair.

Box 503,
Wharton, Texas.

LIKES READERS' VIEWPOINT

I have just finished the April issue of F.F.M. for 1946.

I finished "The Island of Captain Sparrow" with a very disappointed and let-down feeling. It could have been a marvelous story, the author has a very good plot, *but* he just doesn't carry it out. He is too vague on too many things. I enjoy reading a story where certain things are left to the reader's imagination but this one wore me down trying to find out what he was hinting at. On the whole, the author could have made a really good yarn out of it but seems not to know what to do with it once he gets started. It seemed to me to be more an outline than a finished product. I thought the short stories very good and the illustrations for "The Island of Captain Sparrow" were wonderful!

I enjoy the Readers' Viewpoint section almost as much as I do the fiction.

MRS. ARNIECE GURLEY.

277 Keck Ave.
Aurora, Ill.

INTERESTING REQUEST

I've been reading your magazine since 1941 and I thought it was about time I wrote and told you what I think of it. I read about 25 magazines a month and there is only one that comes before F.F.M. and that is your companion magazine *Argosy*.

The reason I started reading F.F.M. was because it had the best of the old *Argosy* fantastics. The reason I keep on reading it is because it still is the best in fantasy. Jack London's opus was great. I really enjoyed it.

I have volume 1 No. 1 of F.F.M. and from Aug. 1941 on, but I need someone to help me fill the gap. I also need all of the *Fantastic Novels* Magazine. I want to put in my plea for old *Argosies* too. I have about 500 copies dating from 1885 on, but there are plenty of copies that I need. If anyone has any, please write. All letters will be answered. If you want to trade I have a large selection of science fiction magazines, some dating back to 1928.

Your for a bright monthly future,

Lynn A. Hickman.

Box 184,
Napoleon, Ohio.

WANT TO TRADE?

Something has been going on that I have just found out about. I have been a reader of Science Fiction stories and Mysteries for some years, but just purchased my first *Famous Fantastic Mysteries;* having finished "Allan and the Ice-Gods" by Haggard. I looked through the Reader's Viewpoint and discovered a sort of readers' exchange. This appealed to me very much as I have various Science Fiction and Mystery books and magazines I would like to trade.

I liked your magazine very much. Of course, any story by Haggard is good, and you are to be congratulated on having his stories.

Would like to hear from anyone with books by H. Rider Haggard or Edgar Rice Burroughs.

R. W. Hunt.

Box 161,
White, S. D.

CAN YOU HELP?

I am a reader of F.F.M. and I congratulate you on your publication of such stories as "The Ancient Allan," "Star Rover" and others. Keep up the good work.

I am in the field for some Burroughs work such as "A Princess of Mars," "Gods of Mars," and all of John Carter's Adventures, "The Moon Maid," "The Cave Girl," "The Mucker." And any other books by the same author. I would like to get the novels: "When Worlds Collide," "After World Collide," "The Dawn of the Flame," "The Red Flame."

Anyone having the books desired please get in touch with me immediately.

John W. Lewis.

649 W. Mulberry St.,
Baltimore 1, Md.

F.F.M. STILL THE BEST

Your magazine is still the best and I wish you all the luck in the world on your continued success. I want to say that I think you should publish it at least monthly, also I and many others would like to see *Fantastic Novels* return.

I would also like to see some of E. R. Burroughs' work in this fine magazine.

I would very much like to get a copy of "Resurrection of Jimber Jaw."

Raymond Dunn.

Longview, Texas.

ENJOYED "STAR ROVER"

My thanks for the superb tale, "The Star Rover" by Jack London. I knew he was good, but didn't realize he was that good. I really enjoyed it.

Also liked the illustration on page 87. Looks like Finlay but doesn't seem to be signed.

Yours for more tales like that.

E. E. Predmore.

New York, N. Y.

SHORT AND SWEET

Being my first letter to you, I'll be brief. I especially admire your magazine for its versatility. Mag is terrific and Finlay and Lawrence superb. Can anyone help me obtain "The Undying Monster"? If anyone can give me any hope of obtaining this, please do so. Here's hoping you will give us a bi-weekly mag.

Jack Clawon.

Rt. 2
Hot Springs, Ark.

WANTS A. MERRITT ITEMS

I am collecting novels and short stories by A. Merritt. Can anyone send me a list of all, or as many as possible, of the novels and short stories he wrote? Also, I would like to know which of these appeared in F.F.M.

I haven't been reading F.F.M. very long. The first one I read was the one with "Before The Dawn" and "House of the Secret." I liked the last one best as I always like the stories where supernatural forces are against man rather than monsters against each other. Second, I read "The Twenty-fifth Hour" issue. I liked it, but not as well as some others. Third, the October issue I liked best of all, except "House of the Secret," although I didn't like "Third Person Singular" so well. Next, the December issue, I didn't like too well—about the same as "The Twenty-fifth Hour." The latest one, "The Star Rover," is another of the best stories I have read in F.F.M. No one should have anything bad to say about "The Star Rover," it had a little bit of every kind of story. My favorite picture was of Darrell Standing in which he had the chain on his legs and it shows pictures from primitive man on up to civilization.

I liked "The Spectre Spiders" second best, and "The Angry Street," third. That was an interesting letter about fantasy in the movies, in the Readers' Viewpoint, although the trouble with such pictures is—first, they change the name, such as "The Island of Dr. Moreau" in the movies to "The Island of Lost Souls." And if you saw this title, you wouldn't know it had anything to do with the story.

A. Merritt's "Burn, Witch, Burn!" or "The Devil Doll" is mentioned but it is unlike Abe Merritt's story. If you did find out the movie was made from that story, you wouldn't see the show you expected.

The only short story I have by Merritt is "Through the Dragon Glass" and I need all others outside of it. The five novels I have are: "Footprints of Satan," "Ship of Ishtar," "Burn, Witch, Burn," "Metal Monster," "Face in the Abyss." I need all outside of these. I want all that appeared in F.F.M., as what I have are not in that form.

Jimmie Fleming.

Box 173,
Sharon, Kansas

P. S. Can you tell me something about the life of A. Merritt? Is he alive yet?

Editor's Note: You will doubtless get all the information you need from readers with Merritt books and magazine stories to dispose of. Mr. Merritt died quite recently.

CALLING NEW YORK AREA

Enclosed is a money order for a year's subscription to *Famous Fanstatic Mysteries.* After two years in the Army, I came home to find a stack of magazines waiting for me. F.F.M. being the best, naturally I saved it till last. I have nothing but praise for every issue. The best of the lot, however, were "Before the Dawn" by Taine, "The Ancient Allan" by Haggard, "Novel of the Black Seal" by Machen.

I have the following books which I would be willing to trade for any issues of S. F. magazines before 1941. "At the Earth's Core," "Pellucidar," "Lost on Venus," "The Warlord of Mars" and "The Eternal Lover," all by Burroughs; "Allan Quatermain" and "The Ancient Allan" by Haggard and "When Worlds Collide" and "After Worlds Collide" by Balmer and Wylie.

I'd like to say that of all the fantasy and s.f. magazines being published, F.F.M. stands way out in front. I'm certainly glad I have a complete set of it.

In conclusion, I'd like to hear from anybody who likes imaginative literature, especially those in the New York area.

James Perrin.

381-3 E. 151 St.,
N. Y. 55, N. Y.

"SPECTRE SPIDERS" GOOD

This is my first letter to any fantasy or science-fiction mag although I have been a steady reader for several years. I must admit there was a time of about three years (army time) that I could not obtain any magazine of this type.

Have obtained the last few issues of F.F.M. but since they have all been well above my expectations, I haven't bothered to write, but now the time has come for me to let you know what I think of your February issue.

Cover: very good, I think, but then Finlay is always good. Strangely enough, this cover fits the story—how about more like it? From Finlay, of course.

"The Star Rover": Good and bad. Story is

excellent but could have been told better. It didn't hold my interest until nearly half way through and even then, at times, interest lagged. The pics illustrating the story were very good.

"The Angry Street": To start off with, the pic was good. That's all. The story doesn't even register, so it's neither good nor bad.

"The Spectre Spiders": Pic could have been better. Story was the best of the issue but not up to your usual standard.

"The Readers' Viewpoint": Swell. I can't see how you could improve it, except for one thing. I would like to have a few comments on the letters, editor, if you have the space.

Since that takes care of this issue, let me mention a few stories of the past that interested me. "The Undying Monster" was one of the best werewolf stories I have ever read. "Daemon" was excellent. "Novel of the Black Seal" was very good. "The Island of Dr. Moreau" I didn't care for. I am a Burroughs fan and any stories by him will certainly be welcome.

How about Merritt, Kline and Stoker?

Looking back over this letter, I don't seem to have given out many compliments, but since this issue isn't up to par, what can you expect? I don't imagine you will publish this, but whether you do or not, I'll still haunt my newsstand waiting for F.F.M.

ORA E. HOLMES, JR.

Box 93,
Ellis, Kans.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I have read and enjoyed your magazine for about four years but have never written to you before. Now, however, I have a suggestion that I consider might be of some value to you in getting a more comprehensive idea of the reader's viewpoint than is now possible. It is simply that in one of your future issues you include a questionnaire that can be filled out and returned to you. It could include such pertinent questions as the following: What authors would you like to see in future issues? What specific stories would you like? Who should do the art work on the covers? Who should do the inside illustrations?

I believe all of these questions and others of the kind have been discussed in recent issues, and under this plan you could find out much better what the readers think.

I am quite sure you would get more replies to this plan than you would get individual letters from the readers. Therefore, you would have a more representative idea of the readers' desires than you would under your present system.

In closing, I would like to congratulate you on an excellent magazine and I feel sure you will keep up the good work.

CLAYTON HAMLIN, JR.

Unity, Maine

OFFER

If any of your readers are interested, I have complete files of *Amazing, Wonder, Astounding, Startling, Captain Future* and many others of which I wish to dispose. Write me your wants. In most cases, offered in complete sets or years only. Condition: excellent, a rarity in these days.

WILLIAM BUCCI.

299 E. 162nd St.,
N. Y. 56, N. Y.

REQUEST FOR HELP

I'm very anxious to complete my collection of back issues if it is at all possible to do so.

I started my subscription with the June issue, and have certainly enjoyed your great magazine ever since. I'm a great lover of fantasy, weird and horror stories, and in my opinion, your magazine prints the best. However, here's my problem and my plea. I managed to pick up an old, battered Dec. 1942 issue, featuring "The Golden City" by Farley, and imagine my horror to find the third installment of "Into the Infinite." Well, that's all I have, so I'm hoping some fan can supply me with the other parts. Also, I want to obtain all back issues from the very first published up until June, 1946. Of course, I've read a great deal of Merritt, Haggard, Lovecraft and others, but so long ago I would gladly welcome them again.

I have on hand several copies of *Amazing Stories, Fantastic Adventures, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Startling Stories* and *Planet Stories*, also thirteen volumes of H. Rider Haggard which I would like to trade for back issues of F.F.M.

Well, now I hope this does the trick, and I'd like to wish you lots of future luck with your stories and your magazine. I'd also like to see some more of Merritt and Lovecraft. I'd be glad to hear from anyone caring to write to me, and will certainly answer all letters.

MRS. E. W. CUNNINGHAM.

Poplar Ave. Lambs Terrace,
R. F. D., Sicklerville, N. J.

BOOKS AVAILABLE

I have the following two Arkham House books available to those readers who are interested: "The Outsider and Others" by H. P. Lovecraft and "Out of Space and Time" by C. A. Smith. Both books are in new condition, dust-jackets included.

FRED ELLIS

2535 Channing Way,
Berkeley 4, Calif.

AN ANALYSIS

After more than three years leave of absence from fantasy and science fiction magazines, I returned the beginning of 1946 to the reading list. It has been interesting to note the changes which have come about.

Sorry to say I think that F.F.M. has gone through an unhappy transition. I can only look back on the first years of its publication with deepest longing. From a magazine of top science fiction and fantasy, it has turned into a ghost and adventure story magazine.

The stories have been tops in writing, yes; but besides being written well they should be qualified for the field of fiction for which F.F.M.

was originally designed. It can't be said that the tales haven't been mostly qualified for the Fanta-Science magazines, but the greatest number of them have been in the category mentioned above. These types of stories have only a minor part to play in the Fanta-Science field.

Taking "The Island of Captain Sparrow" as one specific example; here is an almost pure adventure story. The only fant-stf it held was so minor that the writer could have neglected it, and the story would have lost nothing. To be a real fant-stf tale these qualities should be inherent in its structure.

The satyr and the lost civilization would have made good tales individually or combined. The satyr was shoved into obscurity, and considered as a "normally" degenerate man. The lost civilization didn't come into the picture till the last, and then only quickly and vaguely outlined.

This type of story should appear in magazines like, *Adventure, Argosy,* or *Blue Book.* I couldn't, after reading this, feel that I got what I paid for when I purchased the mag.

Lawrence is good, but Finlay is better. I'm pleased to see him back; but I miss Paul. How about bringing him back? Finlay and Paul are a top art duo. They are tops on my list for fantasy and Science Fiction respectively.

I have subscribed long term, because I feel that there will be some changes due soon; I'll be watching for them.

GORDON M. KULL.

1608 Eleventh Ave.,
San Francisco 22, Calif.

WANTS MORE SCIENCE-FICTION

Congratulations on your publishing "The Star Rover."

The only bone I have to pick concerning the recent policies of yours is this: I believe that at the present time you are stressing the weird, the supernatural phase of fantasy entirely too much. What the mag needs is more in the line of science-fiction. The reason for the popularity of the first few issues was probably because of the s-f content. And the finest stf published. Why not again? Perhaps you might be able to give us science-fiction fans at least one story an issue.

Authors to get: Simak, Keller, Hamilton and Vincent. These all-time favorites have written many classics, and as such, they deserve to be in F.F.M.

I have many old issues of *Amazing, Wonder, Astounding* and various other magazines of many dates from 1928 to 1946 that I'm willing to dispose of. Send your wants to me—I might be able to help you.

Fan-addictly yours,

BEN SINGER.

3242 Monterey,
Detroit 6, Mich.

HAS DUPLICATE VOLUMES

I have, for a number of years, been a reader of your magazine and take this opportunity to congratulate you on your selection of the fine novel, "The Star Rover." I had been trying, for several years, to obtain this novel and had failed dismally. I also wish to ask that you print, for the sake of those who have not read it, Clemence Dane's great book, "The Arrogant History of White Ben." It is a strange book and even if you have read it, it will draw you back into its fold again and again.

I have, in the years of my collecting, obtained a number of duplicate copies of scarce fantasy novels which other fantasy fans might want to obtain, and I wish to dispose of them either for cash or for those fantasy books which I do not yet have in my library. Below I have listed some of these duplicates, all of which are in book form, well bound and in good condition:

By H. Rider Haggard: Ayesha, She, Wisdom's Daughter, Cleopatra, King Solomon's Mines, Allan Quatermain, Montezuma's Daughter, and The People of the Mist—By Arnold: Phra the Phoenician—By Sax Rohmer: The Day the World Ended—By Jules Verne: From the Earth to the Moon—and by Burroughs: A Princess of Mars, The Chessmen of Mars, and Tarzan at the Earth's Core (a Pellucidar story).

ERIC CHARLES.

135 Taylor St.,
Topeka, Kansas.

BOOKS AND MAGS WANTED

I liked very much London's novel, "The Star Rover" in your February issue. I think you should include more illustrations; if you could only get Lynn Ward! Did you ever consider fantastic poetry; a couple pages, or so, of that in every issue wouldn't hurt.

Hope you can print some of these books: "Phantom Ship" by Marryat; "Men in Darkness" by James Hanley; "Riddle of the Sands" by Erskine Childers; "Vampire," or other books by Hans Ewers; "Metamorphosis," or other titles by Franz Kafka; "King Kong" or "Sanders of the River" by Edgar Wallace; maybe some novels by Wilkie Collins.

If any readers have these books, or back numbers of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* or *Fantastic Novels* to dispose of, please write me.

GEORGE X. BASARAB.

P. O. Box 371,
Madera, Penna.

FINE TRIBUTE

As the years roll by F.F.M. seemed to become better and better, if such a thing is possible, and I sat by reading and enjoying in silent bliss. Not once did I criticize or complain. Why should I? The magazine could not have been better even if your most analytical critic had been editing.

And now I write—not to criticize, but to make a plea to fellow readers of F.F.M. My collection is complete from Vol. 1 No. 1 to Vol. 7 No. 5 with the exception of Nos. 1, 3, 4 and 6 in Vol. 5.

In order to tempt those four volumes out of hiding, I have to offer in trade Vol. 4 Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5; Vol. 6 Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5.

These volumes include the great stories by Merritt "Creep, Shadow" and "Burn, Witch, Burn;" Stilson's "Polaris—of the Snows;" Cummings' "A Brand New World;" Tooker's "The Day of the Brown Horde" and a great many others.

These issues are all in good condition, so you readers who have extra volumes look over them and drop me a line. Only trading will be considered until the four missing issues are obtained.

And now I say a silent prayer that F.F.M. continues for years and years bringing to us these fine stories from the past.

Good luck!

FRANK H. WELCH.

RFD 3, Box 9,
Independence, Mo.

HELP!

I like your policy of publishing the S-F classics, but I have missed so many of them in the past—and there is one thing that is nearly driving me nuts—can someone, please, tell me how and where to get a copy of the oft-mentioned "The King in Yellow?" I've got to read it—I must, I must. Who is it by, Arthur Machen?

Everyone who mentions it seems to know but the dealers and all whom I have asked have never heard of it, or just sneer.

M. G. MILLER.

P. O. Box 571,
London, Ontario,
Canada.

COMPLIMENT

Enclosed is my subscription to your fine publication.

With the rapid deterioration of most pulp magazines' output, it is a pleasure to note the high standards you maintain.

The one possible objection I have is the embellishment of the title on the cover. The title type is good, but get rid of the explosive background. The covers are on an average fair with one outstandingly good one every few issues.

FRANK GANCI.

536 W. 136th St.
NY 31, NY

HIGH PRAISE

The April 1946 issue of F. F. M. was to me pleasant though startling surprise, because of the quality of the stories contained in it. In reading these stories, I kept comparing them continually with countless other stories I have read in other "fantastic" magazines and "The Willows" by Algernon Blackwood and "The Island of Captain Sparrow" by S. Fowler Wright stood head over heels in interest, suspense and readability.

In the average run of pulp science-fiction, where anything may happen, where miracles are numerous and gadgets do anything you wish them to do, nothing remains interesting. That is why "The Willows" was so refreshing. The author did an excellent job in building up suspense without assigning to the men x-ray vision and atomic guns and escapes from miraculous, hopeless situations!

"The Island of Captain Sparrow" was also very good reading. Neither Wright nor Blackwood is afraid to use polysyllabic words. Both stories, but especially "The Willows" had "class." Here's hoping your magazine continue to print only the best.

NATHAN BOROWSKY.

69-55 178 St.,
Flushing, L. I., N. Y.

REQUEST

I wish to thank my fellow fans for their help toward completing my files of your wonderful magazine. I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to obtain the following numbers—

Fantastic Novels No. 2—Sept. 1940; F.F.M. Vol. 1, No. 1—Oct. 1939; 3—Dec. 1939; 4—Jan. 1940; Vol. 2, No. 2—May-June, 1940; 4—Oct. 1940.

A. F. GERMESHAUSEN.

3118 W. 9th St.
Los Aneles 6, Calif.

SWAP OFFER

I have several copies of "The Ship of Ishtar" and some of "The Moon Pool" plus 5 other Merritts and about 75 mags and books to trade. Any fan who is interested in trading, get in touch with me.

"The Undying Monster," like all other F.F.M. stories, was good. I enjoyed it immensely, though it dragged in parts.

F.F.M. is my favorite magazine.

JOE GREEN.

Cottondale, Fla.

CURRENT POLICY FINE

It is pleasant for a rather bedraggled veteran to return home and find that his collection of F.F.M. has been kept up to date.

I have no fault to find either with your current reprint policy or with choice of material. To a collector, the excellence or, conversely mediocrity of a fantasy work is of secondary importance. A comprehensive collection must include items of dubious literary merits as well as obvious classics. Not that you reprint many of the former but the mere fact of unobtainability of an item in book form would justify for me your reprinting of it.

In your search for reprint material may I suggest that you do not neglect the current British crop of Fantasy.

I notice a plethora of requests for back issues in recent letters to "Readers' Viewpoint." I have a number of extras which I am willing to dispose of, if fans will write me.

I also have Merritt's "Moon Pool" in book

form (Liveright—2nd Ed.) and the first edition of Charles Fort's "Lo" to dispose of.

JAMES W. THOMAS.

134 Dexter St.,
Valley Falls,
R. I.

ARE YOU A COLLECTOR?

I have been a fan and collector of fantasy and occult books since 1927, during which time I have accumulated several thousands of books, many of the rarest that other collectors are looking for. I have been thinking very seriously of going into the business of dealing in fantasy items, this coming summer, using my collection as a start. Any readers interested in getting fantasy, science fiction and occult books (in book form only) can receive regular lists that I intend to put out. I am well known to practically all the book dealers in New York City, and can locate "hard to find books" your readers may be looking for.

Recently, I have had all my issues of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels* bound by a professional bookbinder and lettered in gold and they certainly look good on my shelves!

STEPHEN J. TAKACS.

121 Freeman St.,
Brooklyn, 22, N. Y.

"WILLOWS" THE H.P.L. FAVORITE

Just a note to let you know how much I enjoyed the April 1946 issue of F.F.M.

I wonder how many of your readers knew that Blackwood's "The Willows" was H. P. Lovecraft's favorite piece of fantasy?

ARTHUR COX.

485½ Hartford Ave.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

REQUEST

This leter is a plea to all good fantasy fans. I'd like to get in touch with anyone who can lead me to the whereabouts of the following: "The Conquest of The Moon Pool", "The Snake Mother"—Merritt; "Into The Infinite"—Hall.

I'd also like to palaver with anyone who has any F.F.M. or *Fantastic Novels* to dispose of.

I'm still waiting to see Wright's "Dawn" in F.F.M. And maybe those Merrittales that weren't available to us before.

DALE JONES.

Box 578
Greggton, Texas

HOW ABOUT IT?

I am disposing of part of my collection and offer copies of F.F.M. for 1939, 1940, 1941 and 1942 (complete file) as well as many books by E. R. Burroughs.

RICHARD G. CLARK.

811 West State,
Centerville, Iowa.

F.F.M. STILL TOPS

It has really been quite some time since I have written a fan letter. Nevertheless, I have not quite dropped out of the picture. Numerous things have forced me to cut all correspondence to a minimum, but I find that it is now more or less of a necessity that I brush the dust from the typer and get to work on something that has been bothering me for some time.

The point is this: I wish to contact fans and semi-pros who might be interested in publishing a book of short stories to be privately printed on a share-the-cost basis. If all who are interested will contact me I am sure the venture will be a success.

I have several books which I would like to trade.

To Jack Evans: Have "When Worlds Collide" and Doyle's "The Lost World." Will send a list to anyone who drops me a card.

Am interested in obtaining the following: Carnaki, The Ghost Finder, Moon of Israel, Ayesha, Ardath, Sorrows of Satan, Out Of The Silence, Slayer of Souls.

These and any other of the type which anyone might have to trade will be considered.

F.F.M. is still tops in the Fantasy field. Only trimmed edges would improve it. Keep it on the present level.

V. R. HEINER.

346 Third St.,
California, Pa.

EIGHT YEARS WITH US

I am writing to tell you that I enjoy your magazine very much. I have read it now for 8 years and I don't believe I have missed a copy. I would like to see some of Burroughs' stories printed.

If anyone is interested, I have available either separately or collectively, an almost complete set of F.F.M., dating from 1939. I also have the four issues of *Fantastic Novels*. Included also are a few *Weird Tales*.

VIRGINIA KLOMPS

Box 363
Valatie, N. Y.

ABOUT BACK ISSUES

In reading your column I notice that many readers are interested in obtaining back copies of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels* as well as other old science-fiction.

Since I am planning to move my home shortly, I am willing to dispose of my collection of magazines. These consist of a complete file of F.F.M. and F.N. with some duplicates, all in "mint" condition with trimmed edges. In addition I have a file of the Gernsback *Amazing Stories* which, considering their age, are in very good condition.

R. C. MAINFORT.

2607 Valley Drive,
Alexandria, Virginia.

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GET THIS FREE BOOK!
This new 128-page book, "Stammering, Its Cause and Correction," describes the Bogue Unit Method for scientific correction of stammering and stuttering—successful for 46 years.
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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES OFFER

I would like to get in touch with other readers who have issues of F.F.M. and *Fantastic Novels* subsequent to February, 1941. In exchange I have to offer quite a number of both magazines issued prior to that date.

Lawrence is very good—almost as good as Finlay. Anyway, in me you have a steady reader.

S. W. McCoy.

951 Harrison Ave.
London, Canada.

CAN YOU TELL HIM?

I am but recently returned from the wars and was pleased to find that you are still operating.

First I would like to know what has happened to E. R. Burroughs and why stories which appeared in magazines in 1940-41 have not yet appeared in book form.

Secondly, I have about fifteen SF magazines, your "Radio Beasts" by Farley, Gernsback's "Ralph", and Stapledon's "First and Last Men" which I would like to swap for Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar" (I'm not kidding) or copies of magazines containing Kline's "Buccaneers of Venus", "Tam Son of the Tiger" or the Jan stories.

John Nevins.

Timber-Till
Battleboro, Vermont
via Wilmington Stage

LAWRENCE IS GOOD

Just out of the Service, I haven't had a chance to catch up on all the F.F.M. stories I missed while overseas, although I have brought my collection of F.F.M. up to date.

I'll dispense with any comment on the stories since some I like a lot better than others although I would like to drop a word on your artists. Lawrence is good, especially with his full page drawings and like the masters Finlay (Fantasy) and Paul (Science-Fiction) his cover drawings place second with his interiors. In other words, all three of these artists show a superior technique with a pen drawing that they don't with a brush. It takes that old master Allen St. John to turn out the covers. In my opinion, his paintings of Fantasy are unequaled although his interiors are mediocre. I have in mind especially his illustrations of so many of Burroughs' books and "The Planet of Peril" by O. A. Kline.

I've noted quite a demand for back issues of your magazine from *readers* and although I'd never part with my complete collection, I do have duplicates of every issue from Sept.-Oct. 1939 through Dec. '41 (except Nov. '39, Jan. '40, Aug. '40, and Oct. '41) including all the *Fantastic Novels* (5) which I'll be glad to let go as a unit.

R. H. Woodcock.

3330 Blakely N. E.
Seattle 5, Wash.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

LIKED FARRÈRE'S YARN

Haggard's "The Ancient Allan" is the best of his novels apropos of Allan Quatermain, but nevertheless contains, as do too many of his books, a superfluity of battles. "Wisdom's Daughter" was quite spoiled for me only because each new phase of the plot was almost always accompanied by a vicious conflict replete with arrows and swords and spears.

I can understand that the vain, proud, beautiful Ayesha could not escape from wherever she must escape without opposition; yet, the book would have been more interesting and less tedious if it had been shorter with less causes for armed strife. There is a basic similarity to nearly all of Haggard's novels—especially the ones localized to Africa—that tired me: at the beginning, after each character has made his entrance and the scene has been set, there is some goal (Kôr, King Solomon's mines, etc.) toward which the protagonist is advancing, either because of a mystic summons or an adventurous propensity, or both.

By the time the destination is attained, the finish is usually just a few pages away. Along the route of travel, all sorts of dangers and inconveniences beset the main character. This becomes boring very quickly. Danger is imperative to adventure fiction, but the author should give his hero (and his readers) some respite occasionally. A first battle is exciting, a second vaguely dull, then the ensuing ones make a reader wish for the denouement and the end of slaughter.

Farrère wrote a very fine story—"The House of the Secret". It was a long time before the important incidents evolved but when they did, the results were marvelous. The creation of the alter ego was expertly achieved, with no confusing abracadabra of scientific elucidation. There was some sinister weirdness surpassing most of the stories in the collection currently one sale. Particularly at the end where the waiting above the grave was described. The divided, spaced sentence structure had a sort of strange rhythm. For some reason the author's style reminds me of that of Guy de Maupassant The illustration of the old man sitting waiting for death above the corpse that is part of him is very fine.

It is terrible I never started reading fantastic literature until F.F.M. had been published for three or four years. Old copies are as rare as a feather pillow in a jail.

Who has these books by Burrough to trade?:

"Tarzan and the Leopard Men," Tarzan the Invincible," "Swords of Mars", "Lost on Venus", "Jungle Girl" and "The Monster Men."

I'm still quite puerile in my reception of each subsequent F.F.M. When I grab up a copy I utter an enraptured "Oh!" and hurriedly turn the pages to learn what Fate, and your endeavor, has to reveal for me.

Can someone tell me the third novel of the "Golden Atom" trilogy by Cummings?

And will someone please—who knows—write

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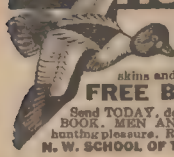

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me anything about Burroughs: his age, personal looks, experience and things of that sort.

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BACK FROM THE WARS

This will doubtless be a rambling and discursive letter; I've just finished reading the three years of F.F.M. published during my time in the service—some of which I'd not seen before—and, I'm overflowing with comments.

First the mag. as a whole. From '43 to early '46 the mag. easily dominated the fantasy field—the ease of the reign probably being due to the enforced absence of the best active stf. authors, which didn't affect you. Thank heaven! The first couple of issues of the non-Munsey pub. seemed a trifle inadequate, not only to me, but also to most of my acquaintances. However, I've since come to believe that any apparent superiority during the good ol' days of '39-'42 (F.F.M.'s old enough to talk about "good ol' days," I suppose?) was due to four causes: 1. trimmed edges: 2. more frequent appearance of the mag. 3. A. Merritt; and most important of all, 4. the fact that the average fan, including myself, *knew* that the *Argosy* yarns were good but was a little doubtful of the resources of non-mag. reprints.

However, I've been completely satisfied; no more doubts.

Now for specific stories and artists. In my modest (?) opinion, the best yarns of the new era have been, in order of merit, "The Lost Continent," "Doorway in Time," "The Ancient Allan" and sort of jumbled—Blackwood's two tales, "Before I Wake," and "King of the Gray Spaces." I've been deeply impressed by your excellent taste in selecting new yarns—they've definitely outclassed all of your shorter reprints.

Worst yarns: "Heaven Only Knows" and "House of the Secret" whose chief flaws were that they just weren't quite up to the F.F.M. average of better 'n average.

Illustrations: Lawrence at his best as on the "Lost Continent" cover or any of his framed pics is unparalleled; however, he—like Finlay—is inconsistent.

Readers' Viewpoint is the best letter section of any fantastic mag. and has been since Nov. '39.

Current issue: April, '46, "Island of Captain Sparrow" is nicely conceived and plotted, but seems to me to bear the marks of carelessness in the writing itself. Maybe I'm just prejudiced; I can't imagine an author dreaming up the dying race of Cîr without trying to exploit them more fully. So tantalizing—but so unsatisfying.

"The Willows" is Blackwood's best—'nuf said.

"Roderick's Story" is barely adequate. It's my private (ouch! hate that word) opinion that present-day mag. editors can beat supposedly "classic" writers 90 percent of the time when it comes to fantastic shorts.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

Cover is the worst since some of the earlier ones.

Hopes for the future: Stapledon, "Last and First Men." Machen, Haggard, the fantastics among the Quatermain series.

Well, that's off my chest. I promise—or threaten—you that part of my civilian tasks will be to write you each issue.

Wishing F.F.M. the best of luck in the years to come,

GARVIN BERRY.

5416-R,
Galveston,
Texas.

REQUESTS HELP

Having just received my copy for April of my favorite fantasy magazine, I feel impelled to send a few lines to express my gratitude. Every issue printed seems to be better—but I know that isn't so, because any of the old copies I have the good luck to obtain contain stories that are just as wonderful! It is truly amazing that a magazine can remain so consistently good.

I am trying to locate several back copies of F.F.M. and am hoping some of the readers might to able to help me. I am hoping to find a copy of F.F.M. for October, 1942, containing the *first* installment of Austin Hall's "Into the Infinite" and a copy for January, 1943, containing the *last* installment. I hope someone can help me out, as I have the second and third installments here; I would be grateful to hear from any readers who have these issues to dispose of.

I have been receiving my F.F.M. by subscription from the U. S. but am now able to buy them from my news dealer here, so must say "many thanks" for the pleasure I would not have had otherwise.

Wishing you many years of continued success—

A devoted reader,
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I have just bought the Feb. issue of F.F.M. Boy, if you just will use more stories and covers like the one on "The Star Rover" by Jack London! Super! Super! Super!

I would like get hold of back issues of *Planet Stories, Amazing Stories, Fantastic Adventures, Astounding Science Fiction, Startling Stories, Captain Future* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories.* Also want back issues of *Planet Comics,* in good condition.

PAUL KERN.

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CAN YOU HELP?

During the past four years while I was in the Army, I was unable to retain certain issues necessary to complete my files and would like to get them now to bring the files up to date.

The ones needed are July 1942, August 1942, all of 1943, March 1944, September 1945 and December 1945.

T/SGT. R. J. WILLIAMS.

73 Harold St.,
North Andover, Mass.

INTERESTED?

I understand that many of your readers are constantly requesting information as to where they may obtain books like "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," Lovecraft; "The King in Yellow"; and "The Moon Pool," Merritt.

I have available the titles listed above, in my private collection.

R. STANLEY PAYNE.

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SWAP OFFER

Just finished "The Island of Captain Sparrow" . . . not bad, though I may be prejudiced, as I have always been a Lovecraft and E.R.B. fan, and in my estimation, Lovecraft was another E. A. Poe!

I have the following stories by Lovecraft in a book form that I will gladly trade for "She," "The Ancient Allen," "Allan Quatermain," "Allan and the Ice Gods" and "The Boats of the Glen Carrig."

The stories I have are "In the Vault," "The Rats in the Walls," "The Outsider," "The Haunter of the Dark," "The Dunwich Horror," "The Thing on the Doorstep" and "The Colour out of Space."

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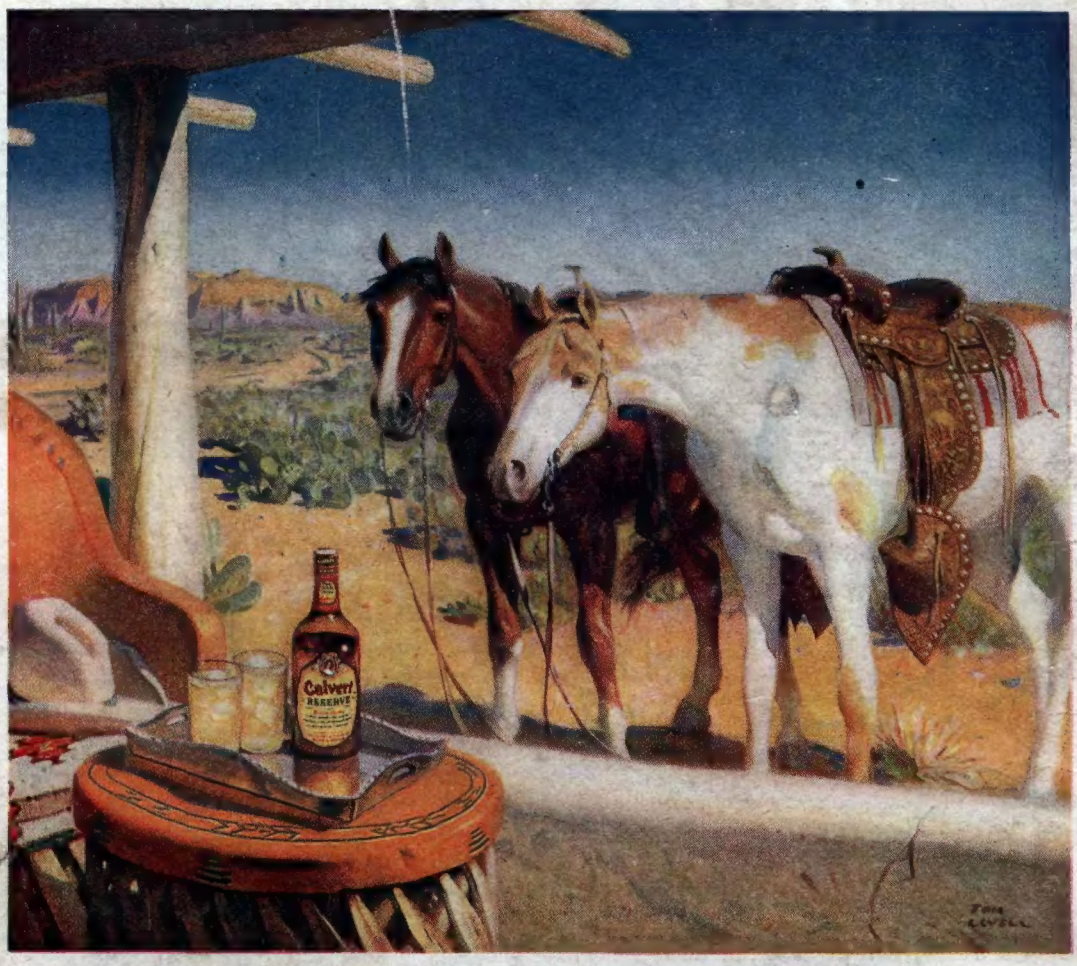

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